MADCAP VIOLET.

BY

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"YOLANDE," "STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A PHAETON," "SUNRISE,"
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CHAPTER I.

"YOU DEVIL!"

THERE was a great silence in the school-room. A young girl of sixteen or seventeen, tall and strikingly handsome in figure, with abundant masses of raven-black hair, dark eyes under darker eyelashes, and proud and well-cut lips, walked up to the school-mistress's table. There was scarcely any thing of malice or mischief visible in the bold carelessness of her face.

The school-mistress looked up from some accounts she had been studying.

"Well, Miss North?" she said, with marked surprise.

"I have a question to ask, if you please, Miss Main," said the handsome young lady, with great coolness and deliberation (and all the school was now listening intently). "I wish to ask what sort of society we are expected to meet when we go abroad, and whether foreigners are in the habit of using language which is not usually applied to ladies in this country. Half an hour ago, when we were having our German conversation with Dr. Siedl, he made use of a very odd phrase, and I believe it was addressed to me. He said, 'You devil!' I only wish to ask, Miss Main, whether we must be prepared to hear such phrases in the conversation of foreigners."

The school-mistress's thin, gray, care-worn face grew red with mortification. Yet, what could she do? There was nothing openly rebellious in the demeanor of this incorrigible girl—nothing, indeed, but a cool impertinence, which was outwardly most respectful.

"You may return to your seat, Miss North," she said, rising. "I will inquire into this matter at once."

Miss Main, who was the proprietor as well as the head-mistress of the school, was greatly perturbed by this incident;

and she was quite nervous and excited when she went into the room where the German master still sat, correcting some exercises. When he saw her enter, he rose at once; he guessed from her manner what had happened. The young man in the shabby clothes was even more excited than she was; and why? Because, two years before, he had left his home in the old-fashioned little fortress of Nesse, in Silesia, and he had bid good-bye then to a young girl whom he hoped to made his wife. England was a rich country. A few years of absence would put money in his pocket; and he would return with a good English pronunciation, which would be of value. So he came to England: but he did not find the streets paved with gold. It was after long waiting that he got his first appointment; and that appointment was the German mastership at Miss Main's school. At the present moment he believed he had forfeited this one chance.

He came forward to her; and she might have seen that there was something very like tears in his pale-blue eyes.

"Yes, she has told you, and it is quite true," said he, throwing out his hands. "What can I say? But, if you will forgif it, I will apolochise to her—I was mad—I do not know how I haf said soch a ting to a young lady; but I will apolochise to her, Meess Main—"

Miss Main had pulled herself together by this time.

"Really, I do not know what to do with her, Dr. Siedl," said she, in a sort of despairing way. "I have no doubt she irritated you beyond endurance; and although I am afraid you must apologize to her, I can quite understand how you were maddened by her. Sometimes I do think she is a devil—that she has no human soul in her. She thinks of nothing but mischief from morning till night; and the worst of it is, that she leads the whole school into mischief; for all the girls appear to be fascinated by her, and will do any thing she asks. I don't understand it. You know how often I have threatened her with expulsion: she does not mind. Sometimes I think I must really get rid of her; for it is almost impossible to preserve the discipline of the school while she is in it."

The German master was so overjoyed to find his own position secured, and his offense practically condoned, that he grew generous.

"And she is so clafer," said he.

"Clever?" repeated the school-mistress. "During the whole of my twenty-five years' experience in schools, I have never seen a scholar to equal her. There is nothing she can not do when she takes it into her head to do it. You saw how she ran up her marks in French and German last term—and almost at the end of the term—merely because she had a spite against Miss Wolf, and was determined she should not have the two prizes that she expected. And that is another part of the mischief she does. Whenever she takes a special liking to a girl she does her exercises for her in the evening. It costs her no trouble; and then she has them ready to go with her in every frolic. I am sure I don't know what to do with her."

The school-mistress sighed.

"You see," she added, with a frank honesty, "it is naturally a great thing for a school like mine to have the daughter of Sir Acton North in it. Every body has heard of him: then the girls go home and tell their mothers that a daughter of Lady North is at our school; then the mothers—you know what some people are—talk of that to their friends, and speak of Lady North as if they had known her all their lives. I do not know Lady North myself, but I am sure she is a wise woman not to have this girl in the same house with her."

After a few words more, Miss Main went back to the school-room; and we must do likewise, to narrate all that befell in her absence. First of all, it was the invidious duty of a small, fair-haired, gentle-eyed girl, called Amy Warrener, to take a slate and write down on it the names of any of her companions who spoke while Miss Main was out of the room, failing to do which she was deprived of her marks for the day. Now, on this occasion, a pretty considerable tumult arose, and the little girl, looking frightened, and pretty nearly ready to cry, did not know what to do.

"Yes, you mean, spiteful little thing!" cried a big, fat, roseate girl, called Georgina Wolf, "put down all our names, do! I've a good mind to box your ears!"

She menaced the little girl, but only for a brief second. With a rapid "Have you really?" another young lady—the tallest in the school—appeared on the scene; Miss Wolf received a ringing slap on the side of her head, which made her jump back, shrieking. The school was awe-struck. Never had such a thing occurred before. But presently one girl laughed, then another; then there was a general titter over Miss Wolf's alarm and discomfiture; during which the tall young lady called out,

"Amy Warrener, put us all down, and me at the head; for we are going to have a little amusement. Young ladies, shall I deliver a lecture to you on Old Calabar and our sewing-class? Young ladies, shall we have a little music?"

She had suddenly assumed the prim demeanor of Miss Main. With great gravity she walked over to the door, locked it, and put the key in her pocket. Then she went to her own desk, smuggled something into a light shawl, and proceeded to the mistress's table, behind which she took her stand.

"Young ladies," she said, pretending to look at them through an imaginary pair of eyeglasses, "you are aware that it is the shocking practice of the little boys and girls in many districts of Africa to go about without clothes; and you are aware of the Camberwell Society for helping the missionaries to take out a few garments to these poor little things. Now, my dears, it is a useful thing for a seminary like mine to gain a reputation for being charitable; and if we manage among ourselves to send from month to month parcels of beautifully sewed garments, every one must get to know how well I teach you, my dears, to handle your needle. But then, my dears, you must not all expect to join in this good work. You all get the credit of being charitable; but some of you are not so smart with your needle as others; and so I think it better to have the sewing of these garments intrusted to one or two of you, who ought to feel proud of the distinction. Do you understand me, my dears? Now some of you, I have no doubt, would like to see what sort of young people wear the beautiful dresses which your pocket-money and your industry send out to Africa. I have here the little pink frock which you, Miss Morrison, finished yesterday; and if you will grant me a moment's patience—"

She took the pink frock from the table, and for a second or two stooped down behind the table-cover. When she rose, it appeared that she had smuggled a large black doll into the school; and now the black and curly head of the doll surmounted the pink cotton garment with its white frills. There was a yell of laughter. She stuck the doll on the edge of the table; she put a writing-desk behind it to support it; she hit it on the side of the head when it did not sit straight. An indescribable tumult followed: all possible consequences were cast aside.

"Now, my dears, what hymn shall we sing to entertain the little stranger? Shall it be 'Away down South in Dixie?'"

The school had gone mad. With one accord the girls began to shout the familiar air to any sort of words, led by the tall young lady behind the table, who flourished a ruler in place of a *baton*. She did not know the words herself; she simply led the chorus with any sort of phrases.

"Oh it's Dixie's land that I was born in,
Early on a frosty morning,
In the land! In the land! In the land!
In the land!"

"A little more spirit, my dears! A little louder, if you please!"

"Oh I wish I was in Dixie,
Oho! oho!
In Dixie's land to take my stand,
And live and die in Dixie's land,
Oho! oho!
Away down South in Dixie!"

"That's better. Now *pianissimo*—the sadness of thinking about Dixie—you understand?"

They sung it softly; and she pretended to wipe the eyes of the negro doll in the pink dress.

"Now, *fortissimo!*" she cried, flourishing her *baton.* "Going, going, for the last time. Take the word from me, my dears!"

"Oh I wish I was in Dixie,
Oho! oho!
In Dixie's land to take my stand,
And live and die in Dixie's land,
Oho! oho!
Away down South in Dixie!"

But the singing of this verse had been accompanied by certain strange noises.

"Open the door, Miss North, or I will break it open!" called the mistress from without, in awful tones.

"My dears, resume your tasks—instantly!" said Miss Violet North; and with that she snatched the doll out of the pink costume, and hurriedly flung it into her private desk. Then she walked to the door alone.

The hubbub had instantly subsided. All eyes were bent upon the books before them; but all ears were listening for the dreadful interview between Violet North and the schoolmistress.

The tall young girl, having made quite sure that her companions were quiet and orderly, opened the door. The mistress marched in in a terrible rage—in such a rage that she could hardly speak.

"Miss North," she cried, "what is the meaning of this disgraceful uproar?"

"Uproar, Miss Main?" said she, with innocent wonder. "The young ladies are very quiet."

"What is the meaning of your having bolted this door? How dare you bolt the door?"

"Yes, I thought there was something the matter with the lock," she answered, scanning the door critically. "But you ought not to be vexed at that. And now I will bid you good-morning."

Thus she saved herself from being expelled. She coolly walked into an adjacent room, put on her hat, took her small umbrella, and went out. As it was a pleasant morning, she thought she would go for a walk.

CHAPTER II.

CARPE DIEM.

This girl was straight as a dart; and she knew how to suit her costume to her fine figure, her bright and clear complexion, and her magnificent black hair. She wore a tight-fitting, tight-sleeved dress of gray homespun, and a gray hat with a scarlet feather—this bold dash of red being the only bit of pronounced color about her. There was no self-conscious trickery of ornament visible on her costume; indeed, there was no self-consciousness of any sort about the girl. She had a thoroughly pagan delight in the present moment. The past was nothing to her; she had no fear of the future; life was enjoyable enough from hour to hour, and she enjoyed it accordingly. She never paused to think how handsome she was, for she was tolerably indifferent as to what other people thought of her. She was well satisfied with herself, and well satisfied with the world, especially when there was plenty of fun going about; her fine health gave her fine spirits; her bold, careless, self-satisfied nature took no heed of criticism or reproof, and caused her to laugh at the ordinary troubles of girl-life; not even this great fact that she had practically run away from school was sufficient to upset her superb equanimity.

Incessit regina. There was nothing of the gawky and shambling school-girl in her free, frank step, and her erect and graceful carriage. When she met either man or woman, she looked him or her straight in the face; then probably turned her eyes away indifferently to regard the flight of a rook, or the first blush of rose-color on a red hawthorn. For, on leaving school, Miss North found herself in the higher reaches of Camberwell Grove, and in this richly wooded district the glad new life of the spring was visible in the crisp, uncurled leaves of the chestnuts, and in the soft green of the mighty elms, and in the white and purple of the lilacs in the gardens of the quaint, old-fashioned houses. Never had any spring come to us so quickly as that one. All England had lain black and cold under the grip of a hard and tenacious winter; even the end of March found us with bitter east winds; icy roads, and leafless trees. Then all of a sudden came south winds and warm rains; and the wet, gray skies parted at times to give us a brilliant glimpse of blue. The work of transformation was magical in its swiftness. Far away in secret places the subtle fire of the earth upsprung in pale primroses, in sweet violets, and in the glossy and golden celandine that presaged the coming of buttercups into the meadows. The almond-trees, even in suburban gardens, shone out with a sudden glow of pink and purple. The lilac bushes opened their green leaves to the warm rains. The chestnuts unclasped their resinous buds. And then, with a great wild splendor of blue sky and warm sunlight, the bountiful, mild, welcome spring came fully upon us; and all the world was filled with the laden blossoms of fruit-trees, and the blowing of sweet winds, and the singing of thrushes and blackbirds. To be abroad on such a morning was better than sitting over an Italian exercise in Miss Main's schoolroom.

"What sort of tree is that?" Miss Violet North asked of a little boy. A particular tree in one of the old-fashioned gardens had struck her fancy.

"Dunnow," said the boy sulkily.

"Then why don't you know, you little donkey you?" she said, indifferently, passing on.

She crossed Grove Lane, and went along the summit of Champion Hill, under the shade of a magnificent row of chestnuts. Could leaves be greener, could the sweet air be sweeter, could the fair spring sunshine be more brilliant in the remotest of English valleys? Here were country-looking houses, with sloping gardens, and little fancy farms attached; here were bits of woodland, the remains of the primeval forest, allowed to grow up into a sort of wilderness; here were rooks flying about their nests, and thrushes busy on the warm green lawns, and blackbirds whirring from one laurel bush to another. She walked along to the end of this thoroughfare until she came to a lane which led abruptly down hill, facing the south. Far below her lay the green meadows of Dulwich; and beyond the trees, and looking pale and spectral in the glare of the heat, rose the towers of the Crystal Palace. That was enough. She had nothing particular to do. Walking was a delight to her on such a morning. Without any specific resolve, she indolently set out for the Crystal Palace.

There was indolence in her purpose, but none in her gait. She walked smartly enough down the steep and semi-private thoroughfare which is called Green Lane; she crossed the pleasant meadows by the narrow pathway; she got out upon the Dulwich Road, and so continued her way to the Palace. But she was not to reach the goal of her journey without an adventure.

She was just passing the gate-way leading up to a large house, when a negro page, very tall, very black, and wearing a bottle-green livery with scarlet cuffs and collar, came out of the garden into the road, followed by a little terrier. The appearance of this lanky black boy amused her; and so, as a friendly mark of recognition, she drew her umbrella across the ground in front of the terrier just as he was passing, and said, "Pfst!" But this overture was instantly rejected by the terrier, which turned upon her with voluble rage, yelping, barking, coming nearer and nearer, and threatening to spring upon her. For a second she retreated in dismay; then, as she saw that the negro boy was more frightened than herself, she became wildly angry.

"Why don't you take your dog away?" she cried; "you—you stick of black sealing-wax?"

In this moment of dire distress help came to her from an unexpected quarter. A young gentleman quickly crossed the road, approached the irate terrier from the rear, and gave the animal a sharp cut with his walking-stick. The rapidity of this flank movement completely took the terrier by surprise; with a yelp, more of alarm and astonishment than of pain, it fled into the garden, and was seen no more.

Violet North looked up; and now her face was consciously red, for she had been ignominiously caught in a fright.

"I am sorry you should have been alarmed," said the young man; and he had a pleasant voice.

"Yes, the nasty little brute!" said she; and then, recollecting that that was not the manner in which a stranger should be addressed, she said, "I thank you very much for driving the dog away: it was very kind of you."

"Oh, it was nothing," said he; "I am very glad I happened to be by." He lifted his hat, said "Good-morning!" and passed on in front of her.

She looked after him. Had she ever seen so handsome, so beautiful a young man? Never!

Just at the present moment several of our English artists are very fond of painting a peculiar type of feminine beauty —a woman with a low and broad forehead, large, indolent, sleepy blue eyes, thin cheeks, short upper lip, full under lip, somewhat square jaw, and magnificent throat. It is a beautiful head enough—languid, unintellectual, semi-sensuous, but beautiful. Now this young man was as near as possible a masculine version of that indolent, beautiful, mystic-eyed woman, whose face one meets in dusky corners of drawing rooms, or in the full glare of exhibitions. He was no roseate youth, flabby-cheeked and curly-locked, such as a school-girl might try to paint in crude water-colors. His appearance was striking; there was something refined, special, characteristic about his features; and, moreover, he had not cropped his hair as our modern youths are wont to do—the short wavy locks of light brown nearly reached his shirt-collar. For the rest he was sparely built, perhaps about five feet eight, square-shouldered, light and active in figure. Was there any harm in a school-girl admitting to herself that he was a very good-looking young man?

Walking about the Crystal Palace by one's self is not the most exciting of amusements. The place was very familiar to Miss North; and she had lost interest in the copper-colored aborigines, and in the wonderful pillar of gold. But she had one little bit of enjoyment. She caught sight of a small boy who, when nobody was looking, was trying to "job" one of the cockatoos with the end of a toy-whip. Well, also when nobody was looking, she took occasion to get behind this little boy, and then she gave him a gentle push, which was just sufficient to let the cockatoo, making a downward dip at his enemy's head, pull out a goodly tuft of hair. There was a frightful squeal of alarm from the boy; but in a second she was round in some occult historical chamber, studying with becoming gravity the lesson taught us by the tombs of kings.

Then she became very hungry, and she thought she would go and have some luncheon. When she entered the dining-room she was a little shy—not much; but she was speedily attended by a friendly old waiter, who quite put her at her ease. When he asked her what she would take, she was on the point of answering, "Cold beef, if you please," as she would have done at school; but she suddenly bethought herself that, being in a restaurant, she might have something better, and so she asked for the bill of fare, scanned it, and finally ordered an oyster *pate* and a couple of lamb cutlets, with green pease and tomatoes.

"And what will you take to drink, miss?" said the old waiter.

"Some water, thank you," she said; but directly afterward she added, "Wait a moment; I think I will take a glass of sherry, if you please."

So the waiter departed; and she turned to glance at her surroundings. The first thing she noticed, much to her surprise and mortification, was that she had inadvertently sat down at the table at which, on the opposite side and farther along, the young man was having lunch to whom she had spoken in the morning. She was annoyed. What must he think of a young lady who went wandering about the country by herself, and coolly walked into restaurants to order cutlets and sherry? It was rather a strange circumstance that Miss North should be troubled by this conjecture; for she rarely, if ever, paid the least attention to what people might think of her; but on this occasion she began to wish she might have some opportunity of explaining her conduct.

The opportunity occurred. That friendly old waiter had apparently forgotten the order; anyhow, the girl sat there patiently, and nothing was brought to her. She wished to attract the attention of the waiter, and made one or two attempts, but failed. Seeing the plight she was in, the young gentleman on the other side of the table made bold to address her, and said,

"I beg your pardon, but I fear they are not attending to you. Will you allow me speak to one of the waiters?"

"I wish you would," she said, blushing a little bit.

The young man walked off and got hold of the manager, to whom he made his complaint. Then he came back; and Miss North was more anxious then ever to justify herself in his eyes. The notion was becoming quite desperate that he might go away thinking she knew so little of propriety as to be in the habit of frequenting restaurants all by herself.

"I am very much obliged to you—again," she said, with something of an embarrassed smile. "I believed they meant to punish me for going away from school."

"From school?" said he, doubtfully; and he drew his chair a little nearer.

"Yes," said she, resolved at any cost to put herself right in his opinion. "I ought to have been at school. I—I walked away—and one gets hungry, you know. I—I thought it was better to come in here."

"Oh yes, certainly," said he; "why not?"

"I have always been left a good deal to myself," said this anxious young lady, leading up to her *grand coup*. "My father is always away looking after railways, and I dislike my step-mother, so that I am never at home. Of course, you have heard of my father's name—Sir Acton North?"

Now she was satisfied. He would know she was not some giddy maid-servant out for a holiday. She uttered the words clearly, so that there should be no mistake, and perhaps a trifle proudly; then she waited for him to withdraw his chair again, and resume his luncheon. But he did nothing of the sort.

"Oh yes," said he, with a respectful earnestness, "every one has heard of Sir Acton North. I am very pleased that —that I have been of any little service to you. I dare say, now, you have heard of my father, too—George Miller?"

"No, I have not," she said, seriously, as though her ignorance of that distinguished name were a grave blot on her bringing up.

"Well, you know," said the handsome young man, meekly, "he is pretty well known as a merchant, but better known as a Protestant. He takes the chairs at meetings, and gives big subscriptions, and all that kind of thing. I believe the Pope can't sleep in his bed o' nights on account of him."

"I—I think I have heard of him," said Miss North, conscious that she ought to know something of so important a person.

At this point she was distinctly of opinion that the conversation should cease. Young ladies are not supposed to talk to young gentlemen to whom they have not been introduced, even although they may have heard of each other's parents as being distinguished people. But George Miller the younger seemed a pleasant young man, who had a frank smile, and an obvious lack of stiffness and circumspection in his nature. They had brought her the oyster *pate;* now came the cutlets.

"That was the mistake you made," said he, venturing to smile. "When you are in a hurry you should not order out-of-the-way things, or they are sure to keep you waiting."

"I never came into a restaurant by myself before," she said, with some asperity. Would this foolish young man persist in the notion that she habitually ordered luncheon in such a fashion?

"What school was it you left, may I ask?" said he, with a friendly interest in his eyes.

"Oh!" she answered, with a return to her ordinary careless manner, "Miss Main's Seminary, in Camberwell Grove. I knew she was going to expel me. We had had a little amusement when she was out of the room—a little too much noise, in fact and though she has often threatened to expel me, I saw by her face she meant mischief this time. So I left. What a pleasant morning it was for a walk!"

"Yes," said he, looking rather puzzled; "but—but—what are you going to do now?"

"Now? Oh, I don't know! There will be plenty of time for me to settle where I am going when I get back to town."

"Are you going back to London all by yourself?"

"I came here by myself: why not?"

"Well," said he, with some real anxiety, "it is rather an unusual thing for a young lady to be going about like that. I think you ought to—to go home—"

"My father is in Yorkshire; I would rather not go to see my step-mother. We should have rather a warm evening of it, I imagine," she added, frankly.

"Where, then?"

"Oh, I know where to go!" she said, indifferently. "There is a little girl at the school I am very fond of, and she is very fond of me; and she and her mother live with her uncle in Camberwell Grove, not far from the school. They will take me in, I know; they are very kind people."

By this time she had finished her luncheon—the young man had neglected his altogether—and she asked the waiter for her bill. She certainly had plenty of money in her purse. She gave the old gentleman, who had systematically not attended to her, a shilling for himself.

"Would you allow me to see you into a carriage," timidly suggested Mr. George Miller, "if you are going up by rail?"

"Oh no!" she said, with a sweet smile; "I can take care of myself."

Which was true.

"Then," said he, "Miss North, I am afraid I can not claim you as an acquaintance—because—because our meeting has been rather—rather informal, as it were; but would you allow me, supposing I were introduced to you—"

"Oh, I should like you to know my father well enough," said she honestly.

"That was not what I meant exactly," said he. "I meant that if I got to know your father, that would be a sort of equivalent—don't you think?—to a formal introduction to you."

The girl very nearly burst out laughing.

"I think we are pretty well introduced already," said she, "by means of a terrier-dog and a stupid waiter. Thank you very much for your kindness. Good-afternoon."

She was going away with her ordinary erect carriage and careless bearing, when he suddenly put out his hand to shake hands with her. She had risen by this time. Well, she could not be guilty of the discourtesy of a refusal; and so she allowed him to shake hands with her.

"I hope this is not the last time we shall meet," said he, with an earnestness which rather surprised her, and which she did not fail to remember when she got into a quiet corner of a railway carriage. Did he really wish to see her again? Was there a chance of their meeting? What would properly conducted people say of her adventures of that morning?

She did not care much. She got out at Denmark Hill Station, and placidly walked up to the house of Mr. James Drummond, which was situated near the top of Camberwell Grove.

CHAPTER III.

A SUBURBAN PHILOSOPHER.

This house was rather like a toy-cottage—a long, low, rambling-place, with a veranda all round, ivy trained up the pillars, French windows, small peaked gables, some few trees and bushes in front, and a good garden behind. Miss North did not wait for an answer to her summons. She bethought herself that she would be sure to find Mr. Drummond, or his widowed sister, Mrs. Warrener, or his niece, Amy Warrener, in the garden; and so she made her way round the house by a side path. Here, indeed, she found Mr. Drummond. He was seated in the veranda, in a big reading-chair; one leg was crossed over the other; he was smoking a long clay pipe; but instead of improving his mind by reading, he was simply idling and dreaming—looking out on the bushes and the blossom-laden trees, over which a dusky red sky was now beginning to burn.

He jumped up from his seat when he saw her, and rather unwisely began to laugh. He was a tall, thin, somewhat ungainly man, with curiously irregular features, the expression of which seldom remained the same for a couple of seconds together. Yet there was something attractive about this strange face—about its keen, vivacious intelligence and its mobile tendency to laugh; and there was no doubt about the fine character of the eyes—full, clear, quick to apprehend, and yet soft and winning. Violet North had a great liking and regard for this friend of hers; but sometimes she stood a little in awe of him. She could not altogether follow his quick, playful humor; she was always suspecting sarcasm behind his drolleries; it was clear to her that, whatever was being talked about, he saw far more than she or any body else saw, for he would suddenly burst into a prodigious roar of merriment over some point or other wholly invisible to her or to his sister. The man, indeed, had all the childish fun of a man of genius; and a man of genius he undoubtedly was, though he had never done any thing to show to the world, nor was likely to do any thing. Early in life he had been cursed by a fatal inheritance of somewhere about 600*l*. a year. He was incurably indolent—that is to say, his brain was on the hop, skip, and jump from morning till night, performing all manner of intellectual feats for his own private amusement; but as for any settled work, or settled habits, he would have nothing of either. He was a very unworldly person—careless of the ordinary aims of the life around him; but he had elaborated a vast amount of theories to justify his indolence. He belonged to a good family; he never called on his rich or distinguished relatives. At college he was celebrated as a brilliant and ready debater, and as a capricious, whimsical, but altogether delightful conversationalist; he was fairly studious, and obviously clear-headed; yet no one ever left a university with less of glory surrounding him. He had a large number of friends, and they all loved him; but they knew his faults. He had no more notion of time than a bird or a butterfly; he was scarcely ever known to catch the train for which he set out: but, then, with ill-temper on the part of a companion could withstand the perfectly happy fashion in which he would proceed to show that a railway-station was an excellent place for reflection? Then, he had a bewildering love of paradox—especially puzzling to a certain ingenuous young lady who sometimes sat and mutely listened to his monologues. Then, he was very unfair in argument; he would patiently lead his opponent on in the hope that at last this unprincipled debater was about to be driven into a corner —when, lo! there was some sort of twitch about the odd face, a glimmer of humor in the fine eyes, and with some preposterous joke he was off, like a squirrel up a tree, leaving his antagonist discomfited below.

He led his sister a hard life of it. The pale, little, fair-haired woman had a great faith in her brother; she believed him to be the best and the cleverest man that ever lived; and no one with less good-nature than herself could have listened patiently to the whimsical extravagances of this incorrigible talker. For the worst about him was that he made remarks at random—suggested by the book he was reading, or by some passing circumstance—and then, when his puzzled interlocutor was trying to comprehend him, he was off to something else, quite unconscious that he had left the other a continent or a century behind him. Sometimes, indeed, he made a wild effort to show that this or that abrupt observation was *a propos* to something—which it never was.

"Do you know," he would say to his patient sister, "I fancy I see something in Fawcett of a sort of political Shelley."

A moment's silence.

"Yes, James," his sister would say, seriously, "but in what way?"

Another moment's silence.

"Oh, about Fawcett? Well, I was thinking, do you know, that if the House of Commons were to introduce a bill securing universal suffrage, the little terrier here would die of despair and disgust. That is the one weak point about dogs—you can't convey to them any impression of moral grandeur. It is all fine clothes with them, and gentlemanly appearance; the virtues hidden beneath a shabby costume are unknown to them. Frosty, here, would wag her tail and welcome the biggest swindler that ever brought out sham companies; but she would be suspicious of the honest workman, and she would snap at the calves of the most deserving of beggars. Sarah, you really must cease that habit of yours of indiscriminate almsgiving—fancy the impostors you must be encouraging—"

His sister opened her eyes in mild protest. "Why, it was only yesterday you gave that old Frenchman half a crown—"

"Well," said he, uncomfortably, "well—you see—I thought that—that even if he was shamming, he looked such an unfortunate poor devil—but that is only a single case. There is a systematic outrage on your part, Sarah, on the common principles of prudence—"

"You do it far more than I do," she said, with a quiet laugh; and so she went her way, only she had got no information as to how Mr. Fawcett resembled a political Shelley.

Only one word needs to be added at present to this hasty and imperfect description of a bright and sparkling human individuality, the thousand facets of which could never be seen at once and from the same stand-point. There was no jealously in the man's nature of men who were more successful in the world than himself. He had a sort of profession—that is to say, he occasionally wrote articles for this or that learned review. But he was far too capricious and uncertain to be intrusted with any sustained and continuous work, and, indeed, even, with incidental work, he frequently vexed the soul of the most indulgent of editors. No one could guess what view of a particular book or question he might take at a moment's notice. Of course, if it had not been for that fatal 600*l.* a year, he might have been put in harness, and accomplished some substantial work. Even if he had had any extravagant taste, something in that way might have been done; but the little household lived very economically (except as regards charity and the continual giving of presents to friends), its chief and important expense being the cost of a large, happy holiday in the autumn. There was no jealousy, as I have said, in Drummond's nature over the success of more practical men; no grudging, no detraction, no spite. The fire of his life burned too keenly and joyously to have any smoke about it.

"Mind you," he would say—always to his consentient audience of one—"it is a serious thing for a man to endeavor to become famous. He can not tell until he tries—and tries for years—whether there is any thing in him; and, then, look at the awful risk of failure and life-long disappointment. You see, when once you enter the race for fame or for great great riches, you can't very well give in. You're bound in honor not to give in. The presence of rivals all round you—and, what is stronger still, the envious caviling of the disappointed people, and the lecturing you get from the feebler Jabberwocks of criticism—all that kind of thing must, I should fancy, drive a man on in spite of himself. But don't you think it is wiser for people who are not thrust into the race by some unusual conciousness of power to avoid it altogether, and live a quieter and more peaceable life?"

Sarah did think so; she was always sure that her brother was right, even when he flatly contradicted himself, and he generally did that half a dozen times in the day.

"Well, Miss Violet," he said to the young lady who had suddenly presented herself before him, "I hear you have rather distinguished yourself to-day."

"Yes," she said, with an embarrassed laugh, "I believe I have done it this time."

"And what do you mean to do now?"

"I don't know."

"And don't care, perhaps?"

"Not much."

He shrugged his shoulders. But at this moment his sister came through the small drawing-room into the veranda; and there was far more concern visible on her face. Mr. Drummond seemed to have but a speculative interest in this curious human phenomenon, but his sister had a vivid affection for the girl who had befriended her daughter at school, and become her sworn ally and champion. Both of them, it is true, were considerably attracted toward Miss North. To him there was something singularly fascinating in her fine, unconscious enjoyment of the mere fact of living, in her audacious frankness, and even in the shrewd, clear notions about things that had got into her school-girl brain. In many respects this girl was more a woman of the world than her gentle friend and timed adviser, Mrs. Warrener. As for Mrs. Warrener, she had almost grown to love this bold, frank, sincere, plain-spoken campanion of her daughter; but she derived no amusement, as her brother did, from the girl's wild ways and love of fun, which occasionally made her rather anxious. To her it was not always a laughing matter.

"Oh, Violet," she said, "what have you been about this time? What can we do for you?"

"Well, not very much, I am afraid," was the rueful answer.

Apparently, Miss Violet was rather ashamed of her exploit; and yet there was a curious, half-concealed, comic expression about the face of the penitent which did not betoken any great self-abasement.

"Shall I take you home?" said James Drummond, "and get your parents to come over and intercede for you?"

"No," she said, "that would be no use. My father is in Yorkshire."

"But Lady North—?"

"I should like to see my step-mother go out of her way the length of a yard on my account! She never did like me; but she has hated me worse than ever since Euston Square."

"Euston Square—?"

"Yes," continued the girl, "don't you know that I am a sort of equivalent for Euston Square?"

"This is becoming serious," said Mr. Drummond. "If you are about to amuse us with conundrums, we had better all sit down. Here is a chair for you. Sarah, sit down. And so you were saying that you were an equivalent, Miss Violet?"

"Yes," she observed, coolly folding her hands on her knees. "It is not a very long story. You know my step-mother was never a very fashionable person. Her father—well, her father built rows of cheap villas in the suburbs, on speculation; and he lived in Highbury; and he told you the price of the wines at dinner—you know the kind of man. But when she married my father"—there was always a touch of pride in the way Miss North said "my father"—"she had a great notion of getting from Highbury to Park Lane, or Palace Gardens, or Lancaster Gate, or some such place, and having a big house, and trying to get into society. Well, you see, that would not suit my father at all. He almost lives on railways; he is not once a week in London; and he knows Euston Square a good deal better than Belgravia. So he proposed to my step-mother that if she would consent to have a house in Euston Square, for his convenience, he would study her convenience, and comfort, by allowing me to remain permanently at a boarding-school. Do you see? I can tell you I rejoiced when I heard of that bargain; for the house that my step-mother and I were in was a good deal too small for both of us. Yet I don't think she had always the best of it."

This admission was made so modestly, simply, and unconsciously, that Mr. Drummond burst into a roar of laughter, while his sister looked a trifle shocked.

"What did you do to her?" said he.

"Oh, women can always find ways of annoying each other, when they wish it," she answered, coolly.

"Well," said Mr. Drummond, "we must see what can be done. Let us have a turn in the garden, and talk over this pretty situation of affairs."

They descended the few steps. Mrs. Warrener linked the girl's arm in hers, and took her quietly along the narrow garden path, James Drummond walking beside them on the lawn. There was a strange contrast between the two women—the one tall, straight and lithe as a willow-wand, proud-lipped, frank, happy, and courageous of face, with all the light of youth and strength shining in her eyes; the other tender, small, and wistful, with sometimes an anxious and apprehensive contraction of the brows. By the side of these two the philosopher walked—a long and lanky person, stooping somewhat, talking a good deal of nonsense to tease his companions, ready to explode at a moment's notice into a great burst of hearty and genuine laughter, and ready at the same time to tender any sacrifice, however great, that this girl could claim of him, or his sister suggest. For the rest, it was a beautiful evening in this still and secluded suburban garden. The last flush of rose-red was dying out of the sky over the great masses of blossom on the fruit-trees. There was a cooler feeling in the air; and the sweet odor of the lilac bushes seemed to become still more prevailing and sweet.

"Don't look on me as an incumbrance," said Miss North, frankly. "I only came to you for a bit of advice. I shall pull through somehow."

"We shall never look upon you as an incumbrance, dear," said Mrs. Warrener, in her kindly way. "You know you can always come and stay with us, if the worst comes to the worst."

"I think that would be the worst coming to the best," said the girl, demurely.

"My notion," said Mr. Drummond, trying to catch at a butterfly that was obviously getting home in a hurry—"is that you ought to give Miss Main a night to cool down her wrath; and then in the morning I will go round and intercede for you. I suppose you are prepared to apologize to her."

"Oh yes," Miss North said, but not with an air of a conscious sinner.

"Miss Main, I fancy now," continued the philosopher, "is the sort of woman who would be easily pacified. So far as I have seen her, there is little pretense about her, and no vanity. It is only very vain people, you will find, who are easily mortified and inplacable in their resentment. The vain man is continually turning his eyes inward and addressing himself thus: 'Sir, I most humbly beg your pardon for having brought discomfiture and ridicule on so august and important a personage as yourself.' He is always worshiping that little idol within him; and if any body throws a pellet of mud at it, he will never forgive the insult. A vain man—"

"But about Miss Main, James?" said his sister. She had never any scruple about interrupting him, if any business was on hand; for she knew that, failing the interruption, he would go wandering all over the world.

"Oh yes—Miss Main. Well, Miss Main, I say, does not appear to be a morbidly vain person, likely to be implacable. I think the best thing you can do is to stay with us to night, and to-morrow morning I will go round to Miss Main, and try to pacify her—"

"I hope you won't laugh at her, James," his sister suggested.

"My dear woman, I am the most diplomatic person in the world—as, for example: we are going in presently to dinner. Dinner without a fire in the grate is an abomination. Now, if I were to suggest to you to have a log of wood put on—a regular blazer, for the night is becoming chill—something to cheer us and attract the eyes, just as you always see the eyes of infants attracted by flames. And where is Amy?" he added, suddenly.

"I have no doubt," said Miss North, with humility, "that Amy is being kept out of the way, so that she sha'n't meet a wicked person like me."

"Indeed, no," said Mrs. Warrener, though sometimes she certainly did not consider Miss Violet's conduct a good example for her daughter. "Amy is at her lessons; she is coming in to dinner to-night."

"Oh, do let me go and help her!" said the visitor. "And I promise to tell her how bad I have been, and how I am never going to do so any more."

So, for the time, the little party was broken up; but it met again in a short time, in a quaint little room that was cheerfully lighted, round a bright table, and in view of a big log that was blazing in the fire-place. The banquet was not a gorgeous one—the little household had the simplest tastes—but it was flavored throughout by a friendly kindness, a good humor, a sly merriment that was altogether delightful. Then, after the frugal meal was over, they drew their chairs into a semicircle before the fire—Mr. Drummond being enthroned in his especial reading-chair, and having his pipe brought him by his niece. Violet North was pretty familiar with those quiet, bright, talkative evenings in this little home; and though at times she was a little perplexed by the paradoxes of the chief controversialist, she was not so much of a school-girl as not to perceive the fine, clear, intellectual fire that played about his idle talk like summer lightning, while all unconsciously to herself she was drinking in something of the charm of the great unworldliness of this little household which promised to be of especial benefit to a girl of her nature. She did not always understand him; but she was always delighted with him. If the quaint humor of some suggestion was rather too recondite for her, she could at least recognize the reflection of it in his face, and its curious irregular lines. Sir Acton North was not aware that his daughter was attending two schools, and this one the more important of the two. Here she saw nothing but gentleness and tender helpfulness; here she heard nothing but generous criticism, and humorous excuses for human faults, and laughter with no sting in it; here she was taught nothing but toleration, and the sinking of self, and the beauty of all good and true things. Then, she did not know she was being taught any more than her teachers knew they were teaching her; for one of them spoke to her only by way of her own example, which was that of all sweetness and charity, and the other was so little of a lecturer that he shocked his own pupil by his whimsical extravagances and incorrigible laughter. If, as Miss Main was convinced, this girl had no soul, she could not have come to a better place to get some sort of substitute.

Next morning James Drummond went round and saw Miss Main. That patient, hard-working, and hardly tried little woman confessed frankly that she herself would be quite willing to have Miss North come back, but she feared the effect on her other pupils of condoning so great an offense. However, Mr Drummond talked her over; and an arrangement having been come to about the public apology Miss North was to make, he went back home.

Miss North had just come in breathless. She had run half a mile down hill, to the shops of Camberwell, and half a mile back, since he had gone out: she would not tell him why.

Well, she went round to the seminary in due course; and in the midst of an awful silence she walked up the middle of the floor to Miss Main's table.

"Miss Main, I have to beg your pardon for my conduct of yesterday, and I wish to be allowed to apologize to the whole school."

"You may go to your seat, Miss North," said the schoolmistress, who was a nervous little woman, and glad to get it over

Miss North, with great calmness of feature, but with a suggestion of a latent laugh in her fine dark eyes, walked sedately and properly to her seat, and opened her desk. With the lid well up, she deposited inside a curious little collection of oddities she had taken from her pocket—including a number of little paper pellets, a small tin goblet, and a wooden monkey at the end of a stick.

The pellets were crackers which she could jerk with her finger and thumb to any part of the room, and which exploded on falling.

The toy goblet had a bit of string attached, and was intended for the cat's tail.

The wooden monkey was an effigy, to be suddenly presented to the school whenever Miss Main's back was turned.

These had been the object of Miss Violet's sudden race down to Camberwell and back; so it was sufficiently clear that that young lady's remorse over her evil deeds was not of a very serious or probably lasting character.

CHAPTER IV.

FLUTTERINGS NEAR THE FLAME.

A SECRET rumor ran through the school that Violet North had not only got a sweetheart, but was also engaged in the composition of a novel. As regards the novel, at least, rumor was right; and there is now no longer any reason for suppressing the following pages, which will give an idea of the scope and style of Miss North's story. The original is written in a clear, bold hand, and the lines are wide apart—so wide apart, indeed, that the observant reader can, if he chooses, easily read between them.

"It was a beautiful morning in May, and the golden sunshine was flooding the emerald meadows of D——, an ancient and picturesque village about two miles nearer London than the C—— P——. Little do the inhabitants of that great city, who lend themselves to the glittering follies of fashion—little do they reck of the verdant beauties and the pure air which are to be had almost within the four-mile radius. It was on such a morning that our two lovers met, far away from the haunts of men, and living for each other alone. In the distance was a highway leading up to that noble institution, the C—— P——, and carriages rolled along it; and at the front of the stately mansions high-born dames vaulted upon their prancing barbs and caracoled away toward the horizon.* Our lovers paid no heed to such pomps and vanities; they were removed above earthly things by the sweet companionship of congenial souls; they lived in an atmosphere of their own, and breathed a delight which the callous votaries of fashion could neither understand nor share.

"Virginia Northbrook was the name of the one. Some would have called her rather good-looking; but it was not of that we mean to boast. We would rather speak of the lofty poetry of her soul, and of her desire to be just and honorable, and to live a noble life. Alas! how many of us can fulfill our wishes in that respect? The snares and temptations of life beset us on every side and dog our footsteps; but enough or this moralizing, gentle reader: we must get on with our story.

"She was the daughter of a baronet, not a man of high lineage, but one on whom the eyes of the world were fixed. He had accelerated the industries of his native land in opening up stupendous commercial highways, and from all parts of the globe his advice was sought. Alas! he was frequently away from home, and as his second wife was a wretched and mean-spirited creature, Virginia Northbrook may be considered to have been really an orphan.

"The other of our two lovers was called Gilbert Mount-Dundas. Neither was he of high lineage; but a grand nobility of nature was stamped on his forehead. His father had attained to great fame through his labors in the cause of benevolence and charity; but it is not necessary to import him into our story. Gilbert Mount-Dundas was yet young; but his mind was fired by great ambitions, and what more necessary to encourage these than the loving counsel and worship of a woman? Ah, woman, woman, if you could understand how we men are indebted to you when you cheer us onward in the hard struggle of life! A ministering angel thou, truly, as the poet writes. If thou couldst perceive the value which we place on thy assistance, then thou wouldst never be capricious, coy, and hard to please. *Mais revenons a nos moutons.*

"It would be a difficult, nay, an invidious, task to describe the manner in which our two lovers became acquainted with each other. Suffice it to say that, although the world might look coldly on certain informalities, their own souls informed them that they had no cause to blush for their mutual acquaintance, an acquaintance which had ripened into knowledge, esteem, and love! Not for these two, indeed, was the ordinary commonplace history of a courtship and marriage; which, as the gentle reader knows, is an introduction at a dinner-table, a lot of foolish conversation always under the eyes of friends, an engagement with every body's knowledge and consent (*including the lawyer's*), and a marriage to be advertised in the newspapers! No, no!—there is still some romance in this cold and heartless world; and, whatever harsh critics may say, we, for one, have no intention of blaming Gilbert Mount-Dundas and Virginia Northbrook simply because, forsooth! the whole host of their friends did not happen to be present. And yet—for who knows into whose hands these pages may not fall?—we must guard against a misconception. We are not of those who scorn the ceremonies of our social life—far from it; and we would not be understood as recommending to the youth of both sexes a lofty contempt for the proper *convenances*. *Tout au contraire.* In our opinion, a young lady can not be too particular as to the acquaintances she makes; and, in fact, the way some girls will giggle and look down when young gentlemen pass them in the street is shocking, and perfectly disgusting. They ought to remember they are not servant-maids on their *Sunday out.* A schoolmistress is not doing her duty who does not check such unlady-like conduct at once; and it is all nonsense for her to pretend that she does not see it. I know very well she sees it; but she is nervous, and afraid to interfere, lest the girls should simply deny it, and so place her at a disadvantage. We will recur to this subject at a future time.

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* This sentence, or the latter half of it, may recall a passage in a famous novel which was published two or three years ago; and I hasten to say that Miss North had really never read that work. The brilliant and distinguished author of the novel in question has so frequently been accused of plagiarism which was almost certainly unconscious, that I am sure he will sympathize with this young aspirant, and acquit her of any intentional theft.

"It was, alas! but to say farewell that Virginia Northbrook and Gilbert Mount-Dundas had met. Such was the hard fate of two who had known the sweet companionship of love for a period far too short; but destiny marches along with an unpitying stride, and we poor mortals are hurried along in the current. Tears stood in the maiden's eyes, and she would fain have fallen on her knees, and besought him to remain; but he was of firmer mettle, and endeavored to be cheerful, so that he might lessen the agony of their farewell.

"'Oh, my Gilbert!' she exclaimed, 'when shall I see you once more? Your path is clouded over with dangers; and, scan as I may the future, I see no prospect of your return. Do you know that beautiful song which says,

"'Shall we walk no more in the wind and the rain,
Till the sea gives up her dead?'

"He was deeply affected; but he endeavored to conceal his grief with a smile.

"'What!' said he, in a humorous manner. 'When we meet, I hope it won't be in wind and rain. We have had enough of both this spring.'

"She regarded him with surprise; for she saw not the worm that was corroding his heart under this mask of levity. And here it might be well to remark on the danger that is ever attendant on those who are ashamed of their emotions, and cloak them in a garb of indifference or mockery. Alas! what sad mistakes arise from this cause! The present writer is free to confess that he is acquainted with a gentleman who runs a great risk of being misunderstood by a hollow world through this inveterate habit. We believe that no truer-hearted gentleman exists than J—— D——, although he is not what a foolish school-girl would call an Adonis; but how often he perplexes his best friends by the frivolous manner in which he says the very opposite of the thing which he really intends! It is very annoying not to know when a person is serious. If you make a mistake, and treat as serious what is meant to be a joke, you look foolish, which is not gratifying even to the most stoical-minded; whereas, on the other hand, you may treat as a joke something that is really serious, and offend the feelings of persons whom you love. No, youthful reader, if I may be bold enough to assume that such will scan these pages, candor and straightforward speech ought to be your motto. *Magna est veritas*, said the wise Roman.

"How sadly now shone the sun on the beautiful meadows of D——, and on the lordly spires of the C—— P——, as our two lovers turned to take a last adieu! He was going away into the world, to conquer fame and fortune for both; she was about to be left behind, to nurse an aching heart.

"'Take this sixpence; I have bored a hole in it,' observed Virginia.

"He clasped the coin to his breast, and smothered it with a thousand kisses.

"'My beloved Virginia!' he cried, 'I will never part with it. It will remind me of you in distant lands, under the flaming skies of Africa, in the mighty swamps of America, and on the arid plains of Asia. Our friendship has been a brief one; but, ah! how sweet! Once more, farewell, Virginia! Be true to your vow!'

"He tore himself away; and the wretched girl was left alone. We must pursue her further adventures in our next chapter."

Here, then, for the present, end our quotations from Miss North's MS. work of fiction; it is necessary to get back to the real facts of the case. To begin with, the relation between Violet North and the young gentleman whom she met on the Dulwich Road were much less intimate, tender, and romantic than those which existed between the lofty souls of Virginia Northbrook and Gilbert Mount-Dundas. Miss Main's young ladies were not allowed to go wandering about the country unattended by any escort, however brightly the sun might be shining on the emerald meadows, and on the towers of the C—— P——. Those of them who were boarders as well as pupils were marched out in pairs, with Miss Main and Miss North at their head; and no one who saw them would have imagined for a moment that the tall and handsome young lady was only a school-girl. When they were allowed to go and see their friends, their friends had to send some one for them. But to this rule there was one exception, which seemed innocent and trifling enough. Miss Main knew of the intimacy between Violet North and the mother and uncle of little Amy Warrener; and she very warmly approved of it, for it promised to exercise a good influence over this incorrigible girl. Then Mr. Drummond's house was only about a dozen doors off; and when Miss Violet chose to go round and visit her friends in the afternoon, as she frequently did, was it necessary that they should be at the trouble of sending for her for such a short distance? Mr. Drummond himself invariably accompanied her back to the school, and on those evenings Miss Main found that she had less trouble with this dreadful pupil of hers.

So it came about that George Miller on one or two occasions had the good fortune to run against Miss North when she was actually walking out alone. On the first occasion, she was just going into James Drummond's house, and she had turned round after knocking at the door. For a second the young man stopped, embarrassed as to what he should do; while she, looking rather amused, graciously and coolly bowed to him. He took off his hat; and, at this moment, as the door was opened, his doubt was resolved, for, with a frank smile to him, she disappeared.

On the next occasion, he caught her a few yards farther down the Grove, and made bold to address her. He said, rather timidly,

"Won't you recognize our acquaintance, Miss North?"

"I do," she said, with her color a bit heightened. "I bow to you when I see you. Isn't that enough?"

"If you were as anxious as I am to continue our acquaintance—" said he.

"I am not at all anxious," she said, rather proudly, "not at all anxious to continue it like this, anyway. You must get to know my friends if you wish to know me."

She was for moving on; but somehow he seemed to intercept her, and there were a great submission and entreaty in his downcast face.

"But how can I, Miss North? I have tried. How can I get an introduction to them?"

"How do I know?" she said; and then she bid him "Good-afternoon," and passed on.

Her heart smote her for a moment. Was it right to treat a faithful friend so? But, then, she was not herself very sensitive to injury; she did not suppose she had mortally wounded him; and she speedily was rejoicing over the thought that the most faithful of friends ought to be put to the proof. If he was worth any thing, he would bear wrong, he would overcome obstacles, he would do any thing to secure and perfect this idyllic and Plantonic acquaintanceship. If he was only an ordinary young man, he had better go away.

Mr. George Miller was only an ordinary young man; but he did not go away. He had not been suddenly inspired by any romantic attachment for the young lady whom he had met in the Dulwich Road; but he had been greatly struck by her good looks; he was rather anxious to know something more about her; and then—for he was but twenty-two—there was even a spice of adventure in the whole affair. She did not know how patiently and persistently he had strolled all about the neighborhood in order to catch an occasional glimpse of her; and how many afternoons he had paced up and down beneath those large elms near the head of Camberwell Grove before he found out the hour when she generally paid her visit to Mr. Drummond's small household. It was some occupation for him; and he had none other at present; for his father was then looking out for some business a share in which he could purchase and present to his son, in order to induce him to do something. Mr. George Miller was not averse to that proposal. He had grown tired of idling, riding, walking, and playing billiards all day, and going out in the evening to dull dinners at the houses of a particular clique of rich commercial people living about Sydenham Hill. It would be better, he thought, to go into the City like every body else, and have a comfortable private room in the office, with cigars and sherry in it. Then he would have himself put up at one of the City clubs; and have a good place for luncheon and an afternoon game of pool; and make the acquaintance of a lot of blithe companions. He knew a good many City men already; they seemed to have an abundance of spirits and a good deal of time on their hands—from 1.30 onward till it was time to catch the train and get home to dinner.

Meanwhile this little adventure with a remarkably pretty girl piqued his curiosity about her; and he was aware that, if he did succeed in making her acquaintance, the friendship of the daughter of so distinguished a man as Sir Acton North was worth having. He did not go much farther than that in his speculations. He did not, as some imaginative youths would have done, plan out a romantic marriage. He had met, in an informal and curious way, a singularly handsome girl, whom he could not fail to admire; and there were just those little obstacles in the way of gaining her friendship that made him all the more desirous to secure it. It does not often occur to a somewhat matter-of-fact young man of twenty-two, who has good looks, good health, and ample provision of money, that he should sit down and anxiously construct the horoscope of his own future. To-day is a fine day in spring, and the life-blood of youth runs merrily in the veins: to morrow is with the gods.

Yet he was vexed and disappointed when he left her on this second occasion. She was, he thought, just a little too independent in manner, and blunt of speech. He did not at all look at their relations from her point of view. If she had told him that he ought to be her knight-errant, and prove himself worthy by great sacrifices, he would scarcely have understood what she meant. Indeed, a consciousness began to dawn on him that the young lady was a school-girl only in name; and that there was a more definite character about her than is generaly to be discovered in a young miss who is busy with her Italian verbs. George Miller was in a bad humor all that evening; and on going to bed that night he vowed he would straightway set off for Wales next morning, and Miss Violet North might go hang, for aught he cared.

In the morning, however, that wild resolution—although, indeed, there was more prudence in it than he suspected—was abandoned; and he somewhat listlessly went into town, to see if he could hunt up somebody who knew Sir Acton North personally. His inquiries had to be conducted very cautiously; and there was something of interest in the search. Eventually, too, that day he failed; and so, as he had to get back to Sydenham to dress for an early dinner, he thought he would go out to Denmark Hill station and walk across. He might get another glance of Violet North, and it was possible she might be in a better temper.

Well, he was going up Grove Lane when, turning the corner, he suddenly found himself in presence of Miss North and another lady. He felt suddenly guilty; he checked his first involuntary impulse to take off his hat; and he endeavored to pass them without any visible recognition.

But that was not Violet North's way.

"Oh, Mr. Miller," she said, aloud, "how do you do?"

He paused in time to prevent Mrs. Warrener observing his effort to escape; he took off his hat, and rather nervously shook hands with her.

"Let me introduce you," said the young lady, boldly, "to Mrs. Warrener. Mr. Miller—Mrs. Warrener."

He received a very pleasant greeting from the little fair-haired woman, who liked the look of the young man.

"What a beautiful afternoon it is!" said he, hastily. "And how fine those fruit-trees look now! We deserve some good weather after such a winter. Do you—do you live up here, Mrs. Warrener?"

"Oh yes. You know the cottage with the thatched roof near the top of the Grove?" she said. She began to think that this young man was really handsome.

"Of course—every one about here knows it. What a charming place! and the garden you must have behind! Well, don't let me hinder you; it is a beautiful evening for a walk. Good-day, Miss North."

He ventured to shake hands with her; he bowed to Mrs. Warrener, and then he turned away—scarcely knowing what he had said or done.

"A friend of your father's, I suppose?" said Mrs. Warrener to Miss Violet as they passed on.

"N-no, not exactly," said the girl, looking down.

"Oh, I dare say some friends of yours know him."

"N-no, not exactly that, either."

Then she suddenly lifted her eyes, and said, frankly,

"Mrs. Warrener, I suppose you'll think me a most wicked creature; but—but it is better you should know; and I never saw that young man till the day I left school over that disturbance, you remember—and he knows no one I know—and I was never introduced to him by any body."

Each sentence had been uttered with increasing desperation.

"Oh, Violet," her friend said, "how could you be so thoughtless—and worse than thoughtless? You have been concealing your acquaintance with this young man even from your best friends. I—I don't know what to say about it."

"You may say about it any thing you please—except that," said the girl, indignantly. "I deserve every thing you can say about me—only don't say I concealed any thing from you. There was nothing to conceal. I have only spoken a few words with him; and the last time I saw him I told him if he wanted our acquaintance to continue he must get to know either my father or some of my friends. There was nothing to conceal. I should be ashamed to conceal—"

At this point it seemed to occur to her that a self-convicted prisoner ought not to lecture the judge to whom he is appealing for a merciful judgment.

"Well, Mrs. Warrener," she said, in a humble tone, "I hope you won't think I tried to conceal any thing of importance from you. I thought it would be all cleared up and made right when he got properly introduced. And just now, when he did not wish to compromise me, and would have passed without a word, I thought I would just tell you how matters stood, and so I stopped him. Was there any concealment in that?"

"But how did you meet him—where did you meet him?" said Mrs. Warrener, still to much astonished to be either angry or forgiving.

"I saw him on the road to the Crystal Palace," said Miss North. "I was attacked by a ferocious dog—such a ferocious dog, Mrs. Warrener! You've no idea how he flew at me! and Mr. Miller came and beat him and drove him away."

"Then you know his name?"

"Oh yes!" said Miss North, quite brightly. "I am sure you must have heard of Mr. George Miller, the great merchant and philanthropist, who builds churches, and gives large sums of money to charities?"

"I have heard of him," Mrs. Warrener admitted.

"Then that is his son!" said Violet, triumphantly.

"But you know, Violet, Mr. George Miller's philanthropy is no reason why you should have formed the acquaintanceship of his son in this manner. Where did you see him next?"

"At the Crystal Palace," said Violet, and the burden of her confessions seemed growing lighter. "I was very hungry. I had to go and get something to eat at the restaurant. I couldn't do any thing else, could I? Well, the waiters weren't attending to me; and Mr. Miller was there; and he helped me to get something to eat. Was there any harm in that?"

Mrs. Warrener was not going to answer offhand; but, as she felt that she almost stood in the light of a parent toward the girl, she was determined to know exactly how matters stood.

"Has he written to you, or have you written to him?"

"Certainly not!"

"He knows your name, and who you are?"

"Yes."

So far the affair was all clear and open enough; and yet Mrs. Warrener, who was not as nimble a reasoner as her brother, was puzzled. There was something wrong, but she did not know what. By this time they had got back to the house.

"Violet, just come in for a minute. James will take you down to the school by-and-by."

"Oh, Mrs. Warrener," said the girl, with sudden alarm, "I very much wish you not to say any thing about all this to Mr. Drummond!"

"Why not?"

"I would much rather you said nothing!"

"Well, I can not promise that, Violet; but I will not speak of it to him just yet."

They entered the parlor, which was empty, and Violet sat down on a chair looking less bold and defiant than usual, while her friend, puzzled and perturbed, was evidently trying to find out what she should do.

"What I can't understand is this, Violet," she said, hitting by accident on the kernel of the whole matter. "What object was there in his or your wishing to continue an acquaintance so oddly begun? That is what I can't understand. Men often are of assistance in such trifles to ladies whom they don't know; but they do not seek to become friends on the strength of it. Why does he wish to know you, and why should you tell him to go and get some proper introduction to you?"

"I did not tell him any thing of the kind," said Miss Violet, respectfully, but very proudly. "I told him that if he wished to speak to me in the future, he must go get some proper introduction. But you do think I asked him to come and see me? Certainly not. What is it to me?"

She was obviously much hurt.

"Then why should you continue this—this—clandestine acquaintance, Violet?" Mrs. Warrener asked, timidly.

"There is no such thing as a clandestine acquaintance," the girl said, warmly. "But if Mr. Miller wishes to add another person to the circle of his acquaintance, am I to forbid him? Is there any harm in that? Don't you sometimes see people whom you would like to know? And, then, if he could not at the time get any one to introduce him to me in the usual way, his getting to know you was quite as good; and now, if you choose to do so, you can take away all the clandestine look from our acquaintance. You have seen him. You could ask him to call on you."

Mrs. Warrener seemed to shrink in dismay from this bold proposal. But, before she could answer, Violet North had hastily, and with some confusion, corrected herself.

"Of course," she said, quickly, "I don't wish you to ask him to call on you—not at all. But when you speak of our clandestine acquaintance, here is an easy way of making it not clandestine."

"No, Violet," her friend said, with unusual firmness, "I can not do that. I could not assume such a responsibility. Before making such an acquaintance in this extremely singular way, you ought to ask your mamma."

"Haven't got any," said Miss North, with a toss of her head.

"Or some one qualified to give their sanction."

"I don't know any one so well as I do you," said the girl; and then she said, "But do you think I am begging of you to patronize that young man? I hope not. Mrs. Warrener, I think I had better go down now."

At this moment James Drummond made his appearance, an old brown wide-awake on his head.

"Ah, well, Miss Violet; no more singing at Dixie's Land, eh? You have never been in Dixie's Land, I suppose. But were you ever in the Highlands? Have you ever seen the mountains and lochs of the West Highlands?"

"I have heard of them," Miss North said, coldly. She was very far from being pleased at the moment.

"Now do sit down for a moment till I open out this plan before you. That is better. Well, I think we shall take no less than two months' holiday this autumn, August and September, and I have my eye on a small but highly romantic cottage in the Highlands, connected with which are some little shooting and fishing; plenty of fishing, indeed, for there are a great many fish in the sea up there. Now, Miss Violet, do you think you could persuade your father and Miss Main to let you come with us part of the time? It must be very wretched for you spending your holidays every year at school."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Drummond," said Miss Violet, with great dignity. "It is very kind of you; you are always kind; but if my friends are not fit to be introduced into your house, then neither am I."

He stared in astonishment, and then he looked at his sister, whose pale and gentle face flushed up. Miss Violet sat calm and proud; she had been goaded into this declaration.

"What do you mean?" said he.

"Oh, James," cried his sister, "I thought Violet did not wish you to know; but now I will tell you, and I am sure you will say I am right. It is no disrespect I have for the young man. I liked his appearance very much—but—"

"What young man?"

Then the story had to be told; and if Miss North had been in a better temper she would have acknowledged that it was told with great fairness, gentleness, and consideration. James Drummond put his hands in his pockets, and stretched out his long legs.

"Well, Violet," said he, in his quiet and kindly way, "I can understand how you should feel hurt, if you suppose for a moment that my sister thinks you wish us to ask that young man here for your sake. But you are quite wrong if you assume that to be the case. We know your pride and self-respect too much for that. On the other hand, might not this Mr. Miller consider it rather strange if we asked him to come here to meet you? You see—"

"I don't wish any thing of the kind," she said, hastily. "Do you think I wish to meet him? What I wish is this—that you should not talk of clandestine acquaintanceship when I offer to introduce him to you, and when you can get to know him if you please."

He was too good-natured to meet the girl's impatience with a retort. He only said, in the same gentle fashion,

"Well, I think you have tumbled by accident into a very awkward position, Violet, if I must speak the truth, and I would strongly advise you to have nothing further to do with Mr. Miller, however amiable the young man may be, unless you should meet him at the house of one of your friends."

"I go to so many friends' houses!"

"How can you expect to go? You are at school: your whole attention should be taken up with your lessons."

"I thought even school-girls were allowed to have friends. And you know I am kept at school only to be out of the way."

She rose once more: the discussion was obviously profitless.

"I don't think I need trouble you to come down with me, Mr. Drummond," said she, with much lofty courtesy of manner.

"I am going with you, whether you consider it a trouble or not," said he, laughing.

She somewhat distantly bid Mrs. Warrener good-bye; and that fair-haired little woman was grieved that the girl should go away with harsh thoughts of her in her heart. As for Mr. Drummond, when he got outside, he was determined to charm away her disappointment, and began talking lightly and cheerfully to her, though she paid but little heed.

"Yes," said he, "you always disgust people by giving them good advice; but you wouldn't have us give you bad advice, Violet? Now, you will be a reasonable young lady; and by to-morrow morning you will see that we have acted all round in a highly decorous and proper fashion; and if you try to gain Miss Main's good-conduct prize this session, I will ask her to put you down a hundred marks on account of certain circumstances that have come to my knowledge, though I can't reveal them. That is settled; is it not now? So your father has come back to London: I see he was in a deputation at the Home Office yesterday. How tired he must be of railways! or does he languish when he has to stop in town three days running? Do you know, I once heard of a boatman at Brighton—one of those short and stout men who pass their lives in leaning over the railings of the Parade—and somebody went and died and left him a public-house in the Clapham Road. You would think that was a great advance in life? I tell you he became the most miserable of men. He got no rest; he moved about uneasily; and at last, when the place was killing him, he happened to put up a wooden railing in front of the public-house just where the horses used to come and drink at the trough, and quite by accident he found it was a capital place to put his elbows on and lean over. I declare to you he hadn't lounged on that railing twenty minutes when all the old satisfaction with life returned to his face; and any day you'll see him lounging there now, looking at the horses drinking. That shows you what custom does, doesn't it?"

Of course, there was no such thing—no such boatman or public-house in the Clapham road; but it was a peculiarity of this talker that when once he had imagined an anecdote he himself almost took it to be true. He did not mean to deceive his listener. If this thing had not happened, how did he know of it? The creations of his fancy took the place of actual experiences. His sister never could tell whether he had really seen certain things during his morning's walk, or only imagined them and stuck them in his memory all the same.

It was a fine, quiet evening up here among the green foliage of the spring. It was a gray twilight, with a scent of the lilacs in the cool air: and the mighty chestnut-trees, the spiked blossoms of which looked pale in the fading light, seemed to be holding these up as spectral lamps to light the coming dusk. It was still a calm, peaceable evening; but even the unobservant Mr. Drummond could remark that his companion was not at all attuned to this gentle serenity. Her moody silence was ominous.

"You will come round and see us to-morrow afternoon?" said he.

"I am not sure," she said, with her hand on the open door.

"Now be a sensible girl, Violet, and believe me that we have given you good advice. Don't forget what I said to you; and come up to-morrow evening to show me that we are all still good friends."

So Mr. Drummond walked away up the hill again, whistling absently; one hand in his trousers-pocket; his hat rather on the back of his head; and unusual gravity of thoughtfulness in his face. Miss Violet, on the other hand, went indoors, and up to her own room. She was the only boarder in the place who had a room all to herself; but on this Sir Acton North had insisted.

She threw open the window, and sat down: far below her they had lighted a street-lamp, and there was a curious light shining on the lower branches of the chestnuts. The sound of one or two people walking in the distance seemed to increase the stillness of the night; and one would not have been surprised to find the first faint glimmer of a star in the darkening heavens.

Peace enough without, but a fierce fire of wrath within.

"They have done it now," she was saying to herself.

"Yes, they have done it. I gave them the chance, and wished to be as proper in my conduct as any body could be; but now they have driven me to something very different. I don't want to see him—I dare say I shall hate him when I see him; but I *will* see him—and I will meet him whenever he likes; and I will write letters to him till two in the morning; and if they won't let me make friends in the ordinary way, I will make friends for myself in some other way. And that is what they have done!"

So the wild winds of folly and anger and unreason blow us this way and that, that the gods may have their sport of us!

CHAPTER V.

SUBTERRANEAN FIRES.

A SUDDEN change came over the tone and style of Violet North's novel. It had opened in a gentle and idyllic mood, dealing with the aspirations of noble souls and the pathos of lovers' partings; it was now filled with gloom, revenge, and detestation of the world. The following brief extract may suffice to show the artist's second manner, and has other significance as well:

"When we bid farewell to Virginia Northbrook in a previous chapter, she had been up to that moment supported by the companionship of one of the noblest of men; but now, when she turned away, with the wild tears glittering in her eyes, she felt, alas! what a bitter mockery the world was, and her young and ardent nature was shocked and wounded by the cruel selfishness of her fellow-creatures. All around her was gloom. No longer did the cheerful sun light up the emerald meadows of D——. Nature sympathized with her stricken heart; even the birds were silent, and stood respectfully aside to see this wretched girl pass. The landscape wore a sable garb, and the happy insects that flew about seemed to be crushed with the dread of an impending storm.

"For why should the truth be concealed? That cruel parting which we have described was wholly unnecessary; it was the result of malice and selfishness of the part of those who ought to have known better; they had determined to separate our two lovers; and their cunning wiles had succeeded. Alas! when will the heartless worldling learn that there is something nobler and higher than the love of Mammon and the hypocritical gloss which they call, forsooth, respectability? Why should not two young hearts fulfill their destiny? Why should they be torn asunder and cast bleeding into an abyss of misery, where hope is extinguished, and the soul left a prey to the most horrible horrors?

"But the present writer must guard himself against being misunderstood in describing Virginia Northbrook's desolate condition. She was alone, and the cold world was against her; but did she succumb? No! her spirit was of firmer mettle. It was a singular point in the character of our heroine that whereas, with kindness she was as docile as a lamb—and *most grateful* to those who were kind to her—cruelty drove her into desperation. When she parted from Gilbert, and took her way home to C——— G———, her soul was more dauntless than ever.

"'Do they think they have conquered me?' she cried aloud, while a wild smile broke over her features. 'No; they will learn that within this outward semblance of a girl there is the daring of a woman!'

"Poor misguided creature, she was deceiving herself. She was no longer a woman—but a fiend! Despair and cruelty had driven her to this. Was it not sad to see this innocent brow plotting deadly schemes of revenge on those who had parted her from her lover, in deference to the idle prejudices of an indifferent world?

"Yes, reader; you will judge as to whether she was or was not justified; and, oh! I appeal to you to be merciful, and take into consideration what you were at her age. We will reserve for another chapter a description of the plot which Virginia invented, together with the manner in which she carried it out."

At this point of her imaginary life, there occurred a considerable hiatus; for her real life, became more full of immediate and pressing interest. Violet North dispossessed Virginia Northbrook. The details of the plot mentioned above must be put in, therefore, by another and less romantic hand.

First of all, this proud, willful, impetuous, and mischief-loving girl suddenly showed herself obedient, attentive to her school duties, and most clearly respectful and courteous to the chief mistress. Miss Main was at first puzzled and suspicious; then she was overjoyed.

"Perhaps," she said to the german master, "it is only to spite Miss Wolf that she means to take the good-conduct prize, as she took the French and German last term; but if she makes up her mind to it, she will do it."

Then all the girls understood that Violet North meant to have the good-conduct prize; and they, too, knew she must have it if she seriously meant to gain it.

Two or three days after this abrupt reformation, Miss Main said to the girl, in a kindly way,

"Miss North, why don't you go up to Mrs. Warrener's as you used to do? Amy has not told me they were from home."

"No, Miss Main," said the girl, with great respect, "they are at home. But—but when I go up there, it seems a pity I should have to trouble Mr. Drummond to come back again with me. It is such a short distance; he must think me very timid or foolish."

"Oh, I am sure," said the school-mistress, "that need not bother you. The distance is very short indeed. You might easily run down here by yourself."

'Oh, thank you," said Miss North, very calmly. "That is very kind of you, Miss Main; for one does not like to be a trouble to one's friends."

There was less of calm respectfulness—there was, on the contrary, a proud and defiant determination—on her face when she went up-stairs to her own room. There she sat down and wrote out three copies of the following mysterious announcement:

"*Violet.—Is G. M. ever about Champion Hill at five p.m.? V. would like to apologize for rudeness.*"

She must have contemplated beforehand sending these advertisements; for she was already supplied with postage-stamps for the purpose.

It was on the third day after this that Miss North met Mr. George Miller; and their place of meeting was the Champion Hill mentioned above.

"How odd you should have seen the advertisement!" said she, frankly going forward to him. There was no sort of embarrassment in her manner.

"What advertisement?" said he, amazed.

"Oh," she said, quickly altering her tone, "it was nothing—a mere trifle. I thought I had been rather rude to you; and I wished to apologize. So I put a line in the papers. Now I have apologized to you—"

"Yes?" said he, rather puzzled.

"Well, there's no more to be said—is there?" she remarked.

"Do you mean that you wish to bid me good-bye? said he, rather stiffly. He considered that this young lady's manner of treating him was just a trifle too dictatorial.

"Oh, I don't care," she said, indifferently. "What were you coming about here for, if you did not see the advertisement?"

"I thought I might see you."

She smiled demurely. "At the head of the school?"

"Any way. Even that would be better than nothing," said he; for she was very pretty, and he lost his head for the moment.

"Well," she said, with a burst of good-nature, "since I'm not at the head of the school, I will walk down with you to the foot of Green Lane. I suppose you are going home?"

"Y-yes," said he, doubtfully. "I wanted to tell you something, if there was an opportunity."

"Pleasant, or not? If not, don't let us have it, please; I have enough of worry."

"You—worry?" said he, with a laugh. "You talk as if you were a woman of thirty. And, indeed, I think all this farce of keeping you a school-girl ought to be burst up. It is quite ridiculous. You ought to be at home, or in some one's house, where you would meet people and be allowed to make friends—instead of slipping out like this, and probably getting us both into trouble—"

"I know," she said, shortly. "What was it you were going to tell me?"

"I have found out a man I know in the City who knows Mr. Drummond," said he, "and he proposes to introduce us to each other—in an accidental way, you understand. Now, will that satisfy you?"

"Satisfy me?" she said, turning her proud, black eyes on him with an air of surprise. "Have I been anxious to be satisfied?"

"I did not say you were," said he, testily. "You seem bent on a quarrel."

"Oh no, I'm not," she answered, with one of those quick smiles that could disarm even the awful anger of an outraged school mistress. "But you must always bear in mind, if you wish to see me at all, that the wish is on your side. As for me—well, I have no objection."

"You are very proud."

"No; only frank."

"Well, about Mr. Drummond—won't that satisfy every body? I have been introduced to that lady—what is her name?"

"Warrener."

"Then I shall make his acquaintance; and if he is a friendly sort of man, I will ask him to dine with me; and very likely he will do the same by me; and I am sure to meet you at his house. Now, is that all right?"

"No, all wrong," she said, with a charming smile. "They won't have any thing to do with you."

"Did you tell them?" said he, with sudden alarm.

"Oh yes," she remarked, speaking very distinctly. "I told them that I had accidentally made your acquaintance; that you seemed to wish to continue it; and that, if they chose, they could be friendly and take you under their charge."

"And what did they say?"

"They refused—too much responsibility."

"Then what do you mean to do?" said he.

"I?" she said, with a bright laugh. "I mean to walk down to the foot of Green Lane with you, and then go back to the school. Is not that good-nature enough for one day?"

"And after that—are we to consider our acquaintance at an end?"

"As you please," said she.

"Do you meam that you propose to continue this hide-and-seek way of meeting—this slinking round corners so as to avoid being caught? Of course, it is very romantic, but at the same time—"

"At the same time," said she, with a clear emphasis which rather startled him, "I mean to say a word to you that you must not forget. I can not allow you to assume for a moment that I care a half-penny whether I meet you or whether I don't. Do you think I wish to play at hide-and-seek? Now please don't talk like that again."

"Well said he, rather humbly, "I no sooner propose one way of putting an end to this state of things than you immediately say it is of no use, and seem rather glad. Perhaps you could tell me another?"

"Oh dear, yes," said she, with great cheerfulness. "Why should we ever meet again anywhere or anyhow? Would not that solve the difficulty?"

"Very well!" said he, driven to anger by her indifference and audacious light-heartedness. "It is better so. Good-bye!"

He held out his hand.

"And I am not to go down to the foot of the lane?" said she, with mock-heroic sadness. "Ah, well! good-bye!"

"You know perfectly," said he, relenting, "that I am anxious we should remain friends. And what is the use of your being so very—so very—independent?"

"Then I *am* to go down to the foot of the lane?" said she, with charming simplicity.

He burst out laughing.

"Well," said he, "I think you are the most willful creature I ever met. But you will get cured of all these whims and airs of yours some day."

"And who will cure me, pray?" said she, with sweet resignation.

"I don't know, but somebody will have to do it."

By this time they were going down the steep lane; the young green of the hawthorn hedge on each side of them shining in the clear spring sunlight; the low-lying meadows and trees of Dulwich far below them, and softened over with a silver-gray mist. In a few minutes more they would part at the foot of the hill; but there was no great premonitory sadness on her frank, young, handsome face.

"What is amusing you?" said he, noticing a sort of demure laugh under the beautiful dark eyelashes.

"Only the poor invention that men have," she said. "You are quite cast down because your scheme of being introduced to Mr. Drummond won't do. Why, a woman could get fifty schemes!"

"Then, give me one?" said he.

"I am only a girl. Besides—how often must I tell you?—it is not my place to do so. But I was thinking to-day how easily I could meet you if I liked—not for a few minutes, but a long time—"

"Could you?" said he, eagerly. "Could you—could you get enough time to come for a long walk, or a drive?"

"I could get away for a whole day!" she said, boldly; but she added, quickly, "if I wished it."

"Then, won't you wish it?" said he. "Look what a splendid drive we could have just now—the best time of the year; and I would try to get some lady I know to come for you."

"Oh no, thank you," she said. "I have had enough of introductions, and relatives and friends, and asking obligations. If I went out for this whole day it would be to show them how little they can control me if I take it into my head not to be controlled. As for going with you, I think I would rather go with any body else; only there would be no mischief in going with any body else."

The declaration was frank, but not complimentary: the short time he had known this young lady had been enough to make him wish she had just a little less plainness of speech.

"Well, will you do it?" he asked.

"Yes, I think I will," she answered, with a sudden firmness of look. She had to recall all her imaginary wrongs to nerve her for this decision.

"When?"

"Next Tuesday."

"And where shall I meet you?"

"Oh, you must drive up to Miss Main's for me, and come into the hall, and send a message."

He looked so horror-stricken that she nearly laughed; but she maintained a business-like air.

"Yes," she said, "is there any thing more simple?"

"Surely you are joking! Do you mean to say that Miss Main would allow you to go out driving with me?"

"Yes, I do; what is more, she will probably offer you a glass of sherry and a biscuit before leaving. If you take the sherry, it will give you a headache."

"But I don't understand—"

"Of course not," she said, with good-natured indulgence. "I told you that gentlemen were poor in invention. But you will see how easily I can arrange all this. I thought of it just to show people how little they know the determination—but I needn't speak about that. Well, here we are at the foot of the hill; good-bye!"

She held out her hand carelessly.

"I must walk back with you."

"No; a compact's a compact."

"Then I am to bring a carriage for you next Tuesday morning, and come right up to the door, and ask for Miss North? Is that all?"

"Yes. Come about half-past eleven."

Mr. George Miller walked away in great perplexity. He had a notion that this wild girl had a great fondness for practical jokes. Might she not be awaiting him at the window, along with her school-fellows, to receive him with jeers?

But, then, he reflected, she was not likely to play any such too notorious prank just after her narrow escape from expulsion. He took it for granted that he was safe from ridicule —which is always a young man's first thought—and then came the question as to the other risks he ran. This was no very safe project—to take a school-girl away for a day's drive, even though he could plead that she had made at least one effort to introduce him to her friends, and that he had made several to be introduced. On the other hand, was he to show cowardice where a girl was not afraid? He would have the finest pair of horses he could hire for that Tuesday morning!

As for her, she walked lightly and briskly up the hill—her fine figure giving her a freeness of step not common among school-girls—and made her way back to Miss Main's establishment. That patient lady took it for granted that her pupil had been round at Mr. Drummond's house.

Violet North went to her own room, sat down, and wrote as follows:

"Camberwell Grove, Thursday Evening.

"MY DEAR PAPA,—I think it is very hard that your own daughter should know only by the newspapers of your return to town. Can not you come over to see me on Saturday? And my money is nearly all gone.

"I remain, your loving daughter,
"VIOLET."

Sir Acton North was an exceedingly busy man, who had not much time for the cultivation of his domestic duties; but he liked this wild girl, and sometimes considered it rather a pity she should have no home but a boarding-school. Busy as he was, he took a run over to Camberwell on the Saturday morning, and had, first of all, a few minutes' interview with Miss Main. Miss Main treated this big, broad-shouldered, white-bearded man, who had kindly gray eyes, and something of a Yorkshire accent, with very great respect. Replying to his inquiries about Violet's conduct, she only remarked that of late it had been excellent; she made no mention of the recent disturbance. She was more anxious to direct Sir Acton's attention to the brilliant greens of the chestnuts, elms, and lilacs outside; to show him that a healthier site for a school could not have been chosen.

Then Miss Violet came into the room, and the school-mistress retired.

"Well, girl," said her father, after kissing her, "aren't you ever going to stop growing?"

"I have had plenty of time to grow since I saw you last," she said, with an air which showed her father that she had not, at least, outgrown her cool frankness.

"And what do you want with me?"

"I suppose a girl must wish to see her father sometimes," she remarked, "when she cannot have the pleasure of admiring her step-mother."

"Oh, Vi, Vi," he said, with a laugh which was not calculated to repel her free frankness, "you are as wicked as ever."

"Well, I haven't forgotten my fondness for you, papa," she said, honestly, going forward and putting her arm round his neck; "so you must tell me all you've been doing, and all you're going to do."

"That will be too long a story," said he; "but I must tell you this—that before long I must go to Canada, and very likely I may have to stop nearly a year there."

Now what was it—some unnamable fear, some flash of a better instinct—which suddenly changed the expression of the girl's face, and made her cry out,

"Oh, papa, couldn't you take me with you?"

"For a year?"

"For twenty years, so that I am with you. I hate England so!"

"Nonsense, nonsense, child!" he said, good-humoredly, and releasing his neck from her arm. "Of course, a girl must have fits of dullness at school; you'll get over these when you are a woman. So you want some more pocket-money? Is your last quarter's allowance run out already?"

She would not answer—she was proud and hurt. He would treat her as a child; he would not see she was earnest in that sudden cry to be taken away from England.

"Well, well," said he; "put this in your pipe and smoke it, Vi," and he gave her a five-pound note, with no thought of the imprudence of trusting such a sum of money to the discretion of an impetuous school-girl.

Somehow a change had come over the manner of the girl even in this short time. She had met him with that gay, defiant spirit that she commonly displayed towards persons whom she regarded with a special affection; then for a second or two she seemed to approach him with an unusual yearning of sentiment. Now she was proud, cold, matter-of-fact.

"Papa," she said, "will you excuse me for a moment? I wish to speak to Miss Main."

She left the room, and went and sought out Miss Main. The school-mistress received her with a kindly look; she was pleased when Sir Acton North visited the school.

"Oh, Miss Main," said Violet, in an off-hand way, "can you let me have a holiday next Tuesday?"

Now, what could the school-mistress possibly think of such a request but that it was one of the utmost innocence, which she was bound to accede to? Here was a girl visited by her father, who rarely came to town. What more natural than that he should propose to take the girl away for a day?

"Certainly, Miss North," said the school-mistress. "I suppose your papa will send for you?"

"I think it is very likely Mr. George Miller will call for me," said Miss North, with a business-like air. "Of course you know Mr. George Miller, Miss Main?"

"By reputation, undoubtedly. I wish there were more such as he in London."

"Well, they live not far from here; so it is very likely he will be good enough to call for me. May I have the pleasure of introducing him to you, Miss Main?"

"I should consider it an honor, Miss Violet," said the simple-minded school-mistress; and Miss North knew she was in high favor when she was called Miss Violet.

"Thank you very much," said Miss Violet; and she was going back to her father, when she suddenly turned. "Oh, Miss Main, my papa has just given me some money; and I do think the feather in my hat is getting a little shabby. Would you allow Elizabeth to go down with me to the shops on Monday forenoon? I wish to buy a few things."

"I will go down with you myself," said Miss Main, graciously.

"Oh, that will be so kind of you!"

"Well, girl, what do you mean by keeping me here?" said her father when she returned. "Do you know I have to be at King's Cross by two o'clock?"

"I am very sorry," she said. "Must you go now?"

"Yes; good-bye, child. Mind you write to me when you want more money."

She kissed him, and bid him good-bye.

"I will see you out, papa. Don't ask Miss Main to come: she is busy. Shall I see you before you go to Canada?"

"Of course, of course, of course! Ta-ta! Mind you behave yourself, Vi; and let me know when your pocket-money runs out."

After he had gone, his daughter had to return to her classes and lessons; and it was not till the evening she found herself with a little spare time on her hands. She felt unequal at the moment to continue her novel, for the details of the dark plot that had been invented by Virginia Northbrook wanted deep consideration. But she had something on her mind; and she came to the resolution to put that down on paper, and subsequently to slip it into the story whenever she got a chance. Here is the passage in question, written with some appearance of haste:

"Virginia Northbrook hated deception; she positively loathed and abominated it. The present writer has never in all his life met with a human being who was as anxious as this girl to have a clear and shining candor illuminating her soul. And why? gentle reader; because she had inherited a heritage of pride—a fatal legacy, perhaps, but it was hers; and her ambition was to be able to look any one in the face and say what she thought without concealment. Alas! we now find her compelled to stoop to subterfuges. Happiness had gone from her mind; horrid suspicion had built its nest there; the cold indifference of the world had stung her into a passion of revenge. What wrecked she of the mad course she was pursuing, when, with a shout of demonical laughter, she called out aloud in her own room, 'Vive la bagatelle?' Let us withdraw for a time from this sad scene. The day may come when we may behold our heroine rescued from the unjust tyranny of heartless friends, and the honorableness of her heart's thoughts demonstrated to the light of day. But in the mean time—alas, poor worm!"

Violet North was so much affected by the sorrows of her heroine that she was almost like to cry over them; although, oddly enough, her sentimental grief seemed to wander back to her father's refusal to take her with him to Canada.

CHAPTER VI.

CRABBED AGE AND YOUTH.

"SARAH, we must not leave that girl to herself," said James Drummond to his sister. He had put aside his wide-awake, and was engaged in brushing a far from shiny hat. "She is offended with us; she has not been here for some days. We shall incur a great responsibility if we let her go her own way."

"We shall incur a great responsibility if we interfere," said his sister, and then she rebuked herself for the selfishness of her speech. "Yes, I must go down to the school and see her. I am sure I wish she would go into some convent, or some institution of that kind, where she would be under gentle moral teaching and proper discipline. She is untamed—a wild animal almost—with some fine qualities in her; and yet I don't know what is to become of her."

"A convent!" said Drummond, with a loud laugh. "She would turn the place into a pandemonium in a week. To think of it now!"—wouldn't it be delightful? Violet North in a convent? Fancy the scare of the quiet creatures when they discovered they had among them a whole legion of demons—as many as you see in "St. Anthony's Temptation:" I should like to have a peep into that convent occasionally if she were there. Well, you'll go down to her, Sarah. Don't preach at her: rather tell her not to make a fool of herself. Of course, she is only hurt and proud; she can not really care for this young—what's his name?"

"George Miller."

"And yet don't lecture her about the folly of a young girl falling in love, or the danger of it, and all that. She won't believe you—no girl will. You might as well expect to keep servants away from the sherry decanter by sticking a POISON label on it. Don't try to frighten her; for there is nothing that girl will allow to frighten her."

Mr. Drummond put on his carefully brushed but not brilliant hat, and went out into the warm sunlight of this May morning. From the height on which he stood he could see, in the far distance, a low-lying mist of brown. That was the smoke of London City, into which he was about to plunge—with no good grace.

And yet when his old college-chum Harding, who had forsaken the paths of learning and taken to tasting teas as a more profitable pursuit, happened to beg of him to come into the City and have lunch with him, he rarely refused. Harding lived in some remote corner of Hornsey; so the two friends had but seldom an opportunity of seeing each other in the evening. On this last occasion Harding had been specially urgent in his invitation—"A friend of mine wants to be introduced to you," he had added.

Drummond called at the office in Mincing Lane, and his short, stout, brown-bearded friend put on his hat and came out.

"Who is the man?" said Drummond, carelessly, as they went along.

"Who wants to be introduced to you? Oh, a young fellow called Miller."

"George Miller?" said Drummond, suddenly stopping on the pavement, with a frown of vexation coming over his face.

"Yes. Do you know any thing of him?" said Harding, with surprise.

"Yes, I do. Did he tell you why he wished to be introduced to me?"

"No, he didn't."

"Well, I'll tell you what, Harding, it's—it's d—d impertinent of this fellow—"

"My dear boy, what's the matter? You do know him? If you don't want to meet him, there is no reason why you should. We can have lunch elsewhere. He asked me in a off-hand way if I knew you—asked to be introduced, and so forth. But there is no compulsion."

"On second thoughts, I will go with you," said Drummond, with sudden determination.

"I tell you, man, there is no compulsion. Let's go elsewhere."

"No, I want to be introduced to him."

"All right: the same as ever—flying round like a weathercock, jumping about like quicksilver."

They went into a spacious restaurant, where a large number of men, mostly with their hats on, were attacking large platefuls of rather watery beef and mutton. Harding was known to many of them; as he passed he encountered a running fire of pleasantries, which he returned in kind. This was an ordeal which Drummond, who had frequently been with his friend to the place, regarded with a mild wonder. There was no one more ready for fun, for raillery, for sarcasm even of a friendly sort; but this sort of ghastly wit, with no light or life in it, but only a crackling of dry bones, rather puzzled him. Then he noticed that his friend was a trifle embarrassed in replying to it; apparently Harding had not got quite acclimatized in the City. There was neither humor, nor drollery, nor epigram in this sort of banter; but only a trick of inversion, by which a man expressed his meaning by saying something directly the opposite—a patter, indeed, not much more intellectual than the jabbering of inarticulate apes. It should be added, however, that the young men were very young men.

"Miller hasn't come yet," said Harding. "What is the matter between you two?"

"Nothing: I never saw him. But I know why he wants to be introduced to me. What sort of a man is he?"

"Oh, well, he is a nice enough young fellow, who has, unfortunately, got too much money in prospect, and consequently does nothing. But now, I believe, he is going into business—his father means to buy him a partnership."

"But—but—what sort of a fellow is he?" said Drummond, who had no interest in the young man's commercial prospects.

"Well, he is fairly educated, as things go—much better educated than the idle sons of rich business men ordinarily are. He sometimes rather gives himself airs, as to his gentlemanly appearance and instincts, and so forth, if strangers are too familiar with him in the billiard-room up-stairs, where they generally have an afternoon pool going on. He is inclined to look down on us poor devils who are in commerce; but that is natural in the son of a business man. He is free with his money—that is to say, he would give you a gorgeous banquet if he asked you to dinner; but it would take a clever fellow to sharp him out of a sixpence; and you don't catch him lending sovereigns to those hangers-on about billiard-rooms, who are always ready to borrow, and never remember to pay. I think, on the whole, he is a good sort of a fellow. I rather like him. You see he is very young: and you can put up with a good deal in the way of crude opinion, and self-esteem, and all that, from a young man. . . . I suppose other people had a good deal to stand at our hands when we were of the same age."

"You don't think he would do any thing mean or dishonorable?"

"I think his own good opinion of himself would guard against that," said Harding with a laugh. "Self-esteem, and not any very high notion of morality, keeps many a man from picking a pocket."

"And he does nothing at all? He has no particular occupation or hobby?"

"No; I think he is an idle, careless, good-natured sort of fellow. Not at all a fool, you know—very shrewd and keen. But what in the world are you so anxious to know all about George Miller for?"

Drummond did not answer; he seemed to have encountered some difficulty in the cutlet that was before him. At length he said, without raising his eyes from the plate, and just as if he were naturally continuing the conversation,

"Well, Harding, I was thinking the most miserable people in this country are the lads and young men who are devoured by ambition: there are thousands and thousands of them, all hungering for the appreciation of the public, all anxious to have their stupendous abilities recognized at once. They can not rest until their book is published; until they have been allowed to play Hamlet in a London theatre; until they have had a chance of convincing a jury, and astonishing a judge. By Jove! if they only knew, wouldn't they be thankful for the obstacles that prevent their making fools of themselves! When they do rush into print prematurely, or get all their friends to witness their failure on the stage, what do they do but lay up in their memory something that will give them many a cold bath in after-days! But I wonder which you should admire the more—the young fellow who is tortured with ambition, and would make a fool of himself if he were allowed; or the young fellow who is much more sensible—probably from a lack of imagination—and lives a happy and free-and-easy life? That is your friend Miller's case, isn't it? Now, don't you think that the young man who—"

There is no saying whither this speculation might not have led, had not Mr. Drummond been interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Miller himself. Mr. Drummond's quick, brilliant, observant eyes were instantly directed to the young man's face. It was a refined and handsome face. There was something pleasing in the modest blush which accompanied the simple ceremony of introduction. So far, the first impression was distinctly favorable; but Drummond remained silent, grave, and watchful, while the younger man chatted to Harding, and explained the reasons for his being late.

Then young Miller turned to Drummond, and rather timidly began to talk to him. As Drummond was never known to remain in the same mood for five minutes at a time, he was least of all likely to do so when that mood was one of cautious and critical severity; so that almost directly Harding saw him, in response to some chance and modest remark of the young man, suddenly brighten up into a laugh, while he retorted with a joke. Mr. Miller was, indeed, relating some stories he had heard as to the tricks of the manufacturers of spurious wines—a subject on which he seemed to have acquired some knowledge. He went on to make a few remarks on the constituents of this or that wine—remarks diffidently made, but obviously based on accurate information. His talk interested Drummond, who by-the-way, was profoundly ignorant on the matter. He neither knew nor particularly cared how a wine was produced, so long as it was pleasant and wholesome. If it was pleasant and proved to be wholesome, he drank it; if not, he left it alone. He would as soon have thought of inquiring into the constituents of this or any other wine as he would of inquiring into the application of the money he paid in taxes. He never knew for what purposes he was taxed, or who taxed him; but he paid the money, and was glad to be relieved from responsibility. He lacked the parochial mind altogether; but he was altogether grateful to the vestries, or boards of guardians, or whatever other and occult bodies took upon themselves the task of local government.

Now, the great respect markedly paid him by young Miller rather flattered Mr. Drummond, who began to be interested in the young man. Moreover, was he not in a position of advantage? He knew Miller's secret aim; Miller did not know that he knew it; if there was any thing suspicious or underhand about the young man, he would have an excellent opportunity of finding it out. He was, on the whole, glad that he had resolved to come to the luncheon; he would not allow the young man to make use of the acquaintance unless he considered that advisable; while he was now in a better position to aid and counsel Violet North.

After luncheon they went up for a brief period to the smoking-room; and then Harding had to go back to his office.

"Mr. Drummond," said George Miller, rather shyly, "I believe you live over Denmark Hill way?"

"Yes; Camberwell Grove," said the elder man, amusing himself by watching the artless tricks of his companion's diplomacy.

"I live at Sydenham Hill. I—I was thinking—you know you were speaking of old books—well, my father has what is said to be a very good collection—it was left him by a friend who went to India some years ago. Now, if you have nothing better to do, would you—would you—come out with me now and have a look at them? You might stay and have a bit of dinner with me too. Unfortunately our people are all down at the Isle of Wight just now; but the servants will get us something. I—I wish you would."

Mr. Drummond could have smiled. The poor young man!—he was working away at his little plot, unconscious how the master-mind beside him was looking down on all its innocent involutions. He would humor the youth.

"All right," said he, "I shall be very glad. Only I must send a telegram to my sister."

So these two oddly consorted people went away down to

Sydenham to the big, gorgeous, solemn, and empty house; and young Miller was as anxious for his guest's comfort as if he had been an emperor. And how respectfully, too, he listened to the elder man's monologues and jerky witticisms, and chance remarks suggested by the various volumes. Much of it all was quite incomprehensible to him; but he did not cease to listen with great attention. Drummond came to the conclusion that Mr. Miller was a very ignorant young man, but decidedly intelligent, and laudably anxious to be instructed. Never had any prophet so humble a disciple.

He staid to dinner too, and accepted with an amused condescension the young man's apologies for a banquet which was certainly varied and abundant enough. None of the wines seemed sufficiently good for so distinguished a visitor. The youthful host bitterly regretted he had not a better cigar to offer Mr. Drummond—the fact is, the box he produced had only cost *7l. 10s.* the hundred. They went out on the terrace to smoke, and sat down in easy-chairs, among fragrant bushes, under a clear, starlit sky. If the young man had any prayer or petition to present, was not this a favorable opportunity?

"I suppose those lights over there," said George Miller, looking across the black valley to a low hill where there were some points of yellow fire, "are about where you live?"

"Yes, I should think so," said Mr. Drummond.

"I—I happen to know a neighbor of yours."

"Oh, indeed," said his wily companion, with an apparent indifference, though he knew what the young man was after.

"At least not quite a neighbor, but a young lady at a boarding-school. I—I believe you know something of her—Miss North is her name—"

"Oh yes, we know her," said Drummond, carelessly.

"Yes, said the other, with greater embarrassment, "so—so I have heard."

"You know her father, of course?" said Mr. Drummond, lightly—which was certainly not the remark that might have been expected to follow such a good dinner, such a good cigar, and so great an amount of attention.

"N–no, not exactly."

"Her friends, then?"

Young Miller got out of his embarrassment by a bold plunge.

"The fact is," said he, "Mr. Drummond, I made her acquaintance in a curious way, and I have been anxious to get somebody who would do all the formal and society business of introducing us, don't you know; for she is a very nice girl indeed, and one likes to know such a sensible, such a frank, good-natured—"

"Oh, I see," said Drummond, apparently making a great discovery, "so you got Harding to ask me to go into the City; and so you have asked me to come out here?"

There was no anger or impatience in his tone; he seemed only asking for information. The night concealed the color that had fired up into the younger man's face.

"I hope you don't think it was impertinent of me," said he. "I am delighted to have made your acquaintance in any case—I hope you will believe that. I thought Miss North had probably mentioned my name to you."

He made no answer to that; he said it was a beautiful cool night, and rose to stretch his legs.

"To tell you the truth," stammered young Miller, I thought that—that if you and I became friendly, I might have an opportunity, sometime or other, of being introduced to her under your roof."

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Drummond, coolly. "And with what purpose?"

"Well, one wishes to have a pleasant acquaintance—that is natural."

"I see," said Drummond, carefully breaking the white ash off his cigar."

George Miller waited for a second or two; surely this was a most unsatisfactory answer.

"You have not yet said—"

"Oh—whether I would ask you to meet Miss North at my house? Well, I see no harm in that. You only wish to make her acquaintance; there is no harm in that. But—but I will see about it."

"Oh, thank you."

Not very long after that Mr. Drummond took his leave, declining at the last moment half a dozen cigars as big as walking-sticks which George Miller declared to be necessary to his comfort on the way home. When he reached Camberwell Grove he said to his sister,

"Did you see Violet North this afternoon?"

"No," she said; "the Kennaways came over and stopped the whole day with me."

"Don't go just yet, then. We must consider. I have met that young Miller, and a very decent young fellow he is, but much too young to be allowed to flirt with Violet North. Now, if they were allowed to see each other occasionally, she is a shrewd enough girl to find out that he is rather a commonplace young man; and I think we ought to let them meet here."

"Oh, James, how dangerous!" cried his sister. "Only think what we may be accused of! Violet North will have money."

"That young fellow will have twenty times as much. However, I am sure the question will never arise. We will talk about this thing to-morrow."

Now "to-morrow" was Tuesday—that Tuesday on which Violet North had determined to put the whole world to defiance.

"Just my luck!" said young Miller to himself after Mr. Drummond had gone; confound it! why was she in such a hurry? He would be willing to have us meet as friends at his house—that is quite certain—and every thing would go smoothly enough; and now comes this pretty adventure of taking her away to Hampton, and there's no escape from that now. And a very nice mess we are likely to get into, if anybody sees us or finds it out, as somebody is sure to do."

CHAPTER VII.

A SUMMER DAY'S RIDE.

The eventful morning arrived, and at an early hour Violet North went to the window of her small room, and with rather an anxious heart, drew up the blind. Behold! all around her and beneath her a world of green foliage, lighted up by the early sunshine; a million flashing diamonds of light on the glossy ivy leaves of the old red wall; black shadows from the broad laurel bushes falling on the brown earth below; the white and purple lilacs, the tremulous yellow blossoms of the laburnum, the upright, cream-hued minarets of the chesnut-trees, all basking in the sun; and two tall poplars, rustling their leaves in the light wind, leading the eye up to the wonderful expanse of clear blue above, where there was not even a white flake of cloud. She was satisfied.

She heard some one passing her door; she went to it hurriedly, and one of the servants turned on the stair and regarded her.

"Elizabeth," said she, "here is a shilling for you; and you must at once run away down to Camberwell, and go to Mrs. Cooke's, the milliner, and don't you come away until you've got my hat, done or undone. Now, do you understand, Elizabeth ?"

"Lor, miss, they was to send it up at eight o'clock, and it is only half-past seven yet."

"But I am sure they won't send it. Don't waste time, Elizabeth, but go and do as I tell you; and don't be argued out of the shop."

When the two or three boarders came down to breakfast, they all knew that Violet North was going away for a holiday, and they were all anxious to see her costume. She was continually surprising them in that matter, for she had some skill in dressing herself, and yet many a poor girl who faithfully copied this glass of fashion, could not understand how these costumes seemed to suit no one as well as they suited Violet North. They could not even say that it was the larger pocket-money of a baronet's daughter which gave her greater latitude in adorning herself; for her dresses were devoid of every sort of ornament. They were the simplest of the simple; no tawdry flounces or eye-distracting bunches of ribbons: their only peculiarity was the studied tightness of their sleeves. But that which made Miss North's dresses seem to fit so gracefully was something outside and beyond the dressmaker's art: the workmanship not of any man or woman milliner, but of God.

She was in capital spirits. Anxious? Not a bit. There was more anxiety in the breast of a young man who, at that moment, was coming along the Dulwich road in a carriage drawn by a pair of fine grays. He almost looked as if he were going to a wedding.

"Yes, Miss Main," said Violet North, going calmly to the window, "here is the carriage; and I see it is young Mr. Miller who has come for me. I would rather have introduced the father to you; but as it is, will you come down and see him?"

"Oh, yes," said Miss Main, graciously.

The young man stood, hat in hand, in the parlor; and, if the truth must be told, with his heart for the moment throbbing rather quickly. He looked from the school-mistress to Violet North as they both entered; the young lady was composed, smiling, and courteous.

"Let me introduce Mr. Miller to you, Miss Main," said she. "Your father is very well known, by reputation, to Miss Main, Mr. Miller; and she almost expected him to come for me this morning. But I suppose he had some other engagement."

"Y-yes," stammered the young man; and then he added, hastily, "Are you ready to go now, Miss North?"

He was desperately anxious to get out of the house; he knew not at what moment he might make a blunder. That there was some mystification about was evident from Miss Main's innocent helplessness in the matter.

"Good-morning, Miss Main," said Miss North; "I dare say I shall be back about six."

When she stepped out into the sunlight, and saw the two gray horses before her she could scarcely refrain from smiling—it was very like a runaway marriage. And so thought the girls upstairs, who were all at the window; and who, when they saw the young lady in gray and dark-brown velvet—with her gray hat now adorned with a bold white feather—handed into the carriage, could not help admitting that a handsomer bride had never been taken to church. And was not he handsome, too—the slender, square-shouldered young man, with the straight nostrils and finely cut mouth? They drove away in the clear sunshine; and the girls were of opinion that, if it were not a marriage, it ought to have been.

George Miller heaved a great sigh of relief: he had not been at all comfortable while in that room.

"How did you manage it?" said he.

"Oh," said she, with a revengeful triumph in her manner that he did not quite understand, "the easiest thing in the world! That dear good school-mistress thinks we are going to some flower-show or other, where your father, and my father, and every body else's father, are all to be together. Coachman!"

The man turned round.

"Would you please go through this lane and up Grove Hill?" She did not wish to pass in front of Mr. Drummond's house.

"And did you tell her all that?" said he.

"Not I. She inferred it all for herself. But never mind that. Isn't it fine to be off for a holiday?—and what a holiday, too! I never saw this place looking so lovely."

They were driving along the crest of Champion Hill; and as there was a bank of black cloud all along the southern sky, against this dark background the wonderful light greens of the spring foliage seemed to be interfused with a lambent sunshine. Here were young lime-trees, with slender and jet-black branches; tall and swaying poplars; branching and picturesque elms; massive chestnuts and feathery birches; and now and again, looking into a bit of wood, they saw a strange green twilight produced by the sun beating on the canopy of foliage above. It was a spring-day in look—the heavy purple in the south, the clear blue above, with glimpses through the lofty elms of sailing white clouds blown along by a western breeze.

"Where are we going?" said she, though, in point of fact, she did not care much. It was enough to be out in freedom, in the cool air and the clear sunshine.

"I thought of Hampton," said he, timidly. "The river is pretty there, and we must have luncheon."

"Are there not a good many Cockneys there?" said she, with an air of lofty criticism. "Don't they call it 'Appy 'Ampton?'"

"You'll scarcely find any body there on a Tuesday," said he.

"Ah, you thought of that?"

"Yes."

"Thank you."

She was quite gracious; but somehow he was never sure that she was not joking. Was it not with some hidden sarcasm that this school-girl said "Thank you," with the high courtesy of an empress?

Suddenly she burst out laughing; and then he knew she was natural enough.

"If Miss Main should hear of this," she cried, "I do think she'll have a fit! It will be worth all the money to see her!"

"I don't see any thing to laugh at in it," said he, "for, to tell you the truth, I don't see the necessity of your going on in this way."

She stared at him for a moment.

"Tell the man to stop," said she, with sudden decision. "I don't see the necessity, either, of our going on like this. I have had enough of the driving, and I can walk back."

"Now please don't be foolish," said he, in a low voice. "Why won't you wait until I explain? I said it was unnecessary, for there is no longer any reason why we should not meet each other just as ordinary people do. Mr. Drummond dined with me last night."

The announcement did not startle her as he had expected.

"I don't care," said she.

"But what is the use of risking trouble?"

"They goaded me into it," said she.

"Then do you mean to refuse?"

"Now," said she, "what is the use of arguing on such a morning? I said I would go with you for a nice drive, and here I am; and now you begin to talk about difficulties and disagreeable people. Why can't you let well alone?"

He was effectually silenced: and that was not the first time he had found himself unable to cope with the pronounced character of this mere school-girl. Of course, he did not like it. There was a frown on his handsome face; and he sat moody and silent. After a bit, she looked at him, and there was a mischievous look of amusement in her eyes.

"Have I offended you?" she said.

"No; but you have been rather rude," said he.

"Well, that is pretty language," said she, with a good-natured laugh, "to address to a young lady. By-and-by I shall find you following the example of Dr. Siedl. He called me a devil, the other day."

"I don't wonder at it," said he; and this confession so tickled her, and pleased her, that she got into a fit of laughing, which eventually conquered his surliness. He could not help laughing too.

"Do you know what an exasperating person you are?" said he.

"Well," she candidly admitted, "one or two people have hinted as much to me; but I always considered it jealousy on their part—jealousy of my superior sweetness. I do assure you I consider myself very amiable. Of course, if people choose to be disagreeable—"

"That means if people don't give you your own way in every thing, you will take it."

"Well, there is something in that. However, let us say no more about it. I forgive you."

She settled herself comfortably in the carriage, the sunlight just catching the fine color of her face, and the light breeze stirring ends and tatters of her masses of dark hair. If she was a runaway school-girl, there was little fear about her. She was criticising the appearance of the houses on Denmark Hill and Herne Hill as they drove past; she was calling attention to the pale purple blossoms of the wistaria hanging in front of the sunlit walls; or to the light, sunny, velvety green becoming visible on the upper side of the black and shelving branches of the cedars. What sort of people were they who had these houses? What was their income? Would Mr. Miller like to live there?

Then for a time they got away from the houses; and, behold! here were beautiful green meadows yellowed over with kingcups, and hedges white with the May. Past some houses again, and into the long broad avenues of Clapham Park. Was not this Clapham Common, with its golden gorse and gigantic birch-trees? They dip into another hollow, and rise again; and by-and-by they get well out into the country—the perpetual road of sunlit brown, the green fringe of hedge, the blue sky with its long flakes of white, and the musical, monotonous patter of the horses' feet.

"So you saw Mr. Drummond last night?" said Violet. "Well what do you think of him? No—don't tell me; for unless you admired him very much—very much indeed—you and I should quarrel."

"I thought you were rather offended with him just now?" said George Miller, with some surprise.

"You can be offended with people you admire and like, can you not?"

"Oh, I found him a very pleasant fellow—rather eccentric, you know—rather too much given to puzzling you about things—"

"He can not help your not understanding him," said Miss Violet, innocently.

"As for that, I don't suppose he has all the wisdom in the world," said George Miller, who was only a young man, and quick to imagine rivalry. "And you must admit that he isn't very good-looking."

"I dislike dolls," said Miss Violet; "I like men to be men—not dolls."

And now they had come—why, this easy, delightful traveling was like a dream!—to the high ground overlooking the far stretches of Wimbledon Common; and here, indeed, were two immense parallel plains, that of the fair blue sky above, and that of the black heath below, dotted here and there with yellow furze. Far away at the edge of the world there lay a ring of low-lying wooded country, that somehow seemed to suggest the mystic neighborhood of the sea.

"What a fine scent the wind brings with it," said Miss Violet, "when it blows over the gorse! Why can't they bottle that, instead of carnation, and peppermint, and such stuffs? fancy getting a breath of country air into a London church. Do you like red hawthorn?"

"Yes, rather."

"I don't. It's too jammy. It looks as if it had been dipped red by a confectioner. I believe in the real white natural stuff."

"But the one is as natural as the other," said he.

"I am not going to argue," she retorted, with great condescension, "the weather is too fine."

With their youthful spirits and a joyous day, and a capital pair of horses, the time was passing pleasantly enough; but at this point their enjoyment was interrupted by a pitiful accident. They had got past the Robin Hood gate, and were rolling along the valley. A woman was coming in the opposite direction with her two children—one in her arms, and one whom she had allowed to lag far behind. Now, there was a cart laden with timber in the way, and as Miller's coachman drove to the right of the road to pass it, it unfortunately happened that the child, a little girl, stumbled at the edge of the pathway, and almost rolled against the carriage. She was not run over, but she struck her head against the hind wheel; and when Violet North, quick as lightning, opened the carriage door, jumped down, and caught up the child, blood was flowing from a slight scalp-wound. The girl, who had caught up the child long before the mother could reach it, and who did not know that the wound was not very dangerous, was frantic in her indignation.

"*You* a driver!" she said, with her eyes flashing. "Why didn't you stop your horses? You—you—you're not fit to—Oh, my poor child, I think we've murdered you!"

She ran with the child back to the public-house: there—the mother not seeking to relieve her of her burden—she got water and washed the wound, and tied it up as well as she could with linen they brought her. The coachman came in—he was explaining to the people that it was not his fault at all.

"Hold your peace!" she said.

Then she turned to the mother.

"Where do you live? Give me your address—I will come and see you."

She quickly pulled out her purse. All this time her face was very pale and determined. George Miller interfered, and said,

"Here, my good woman, is a sovereign for you."

"She shall have ten sovereigns—she shall have twenty sovereigns!" the girl said, almost with a stamp of her foot, and with abundant tears rushing into her eyes. "Here, mother, is all the money I've got—I'm sorry we can do nothing but give you money. But I will come and see you—my father will come and see you. You go to a surgery when you get up to Wandsworth, and get a good doctor, and I'll pay him—now, don't you forget; I will look after you."

"Thank you kindly, miss," said the poor woman; and the men standing by, when the girl went out, said to each other, "There now, that's a real lady, that is; that's none o' your fine, stuck-up gentry as is too proud to step down from their carriages; that's a real lady, that is."

The carriage was outside, and the coachman again on his box. She went up to him.

"I beg your pardon," said she, distinctly. "I believe I was wrong. I don't think you could have helped it."

"Well, miss, I don't think I could," said he. "But there's no great harm done—no bones broken. "It'll only be a scar."

And so they drove on once more; but Mr. Miller was not at all pleased at the way he had been treated in that wayside public-house.

"How do you propose to get your father to go and see that woman? How will you explain your being here?"

"I don't mind that," she said.

"He could do no good. How much money did you give her?"

"Three sovereigns and some silver."

"So she has got over four pounds on account of that cut. I don't think she'd mind having the whole of her family treated in the same way."

"If you had your head laid open," she retorted, "I wonder how much your friends would think a proper compensation."

They drove on for some distance in silence.

"I think," said he, "we are having a fair amount of quarreling for a single day."

"But that," she answered, with a charming smile, "is only to show what good friends we are. Of course, if we had met each other at a dinner party, and then at a ball, and then at a dinner party, we should be excessively polite to each other. Would you rather like that? Shall we try—from here to Hampton? Shall I begin? *I beg your pardon, my dear Mr. Miller, but would you have the goodness to tell me what o'clock it is?*"

The abrupt change of manner, and the air with which she made the inquiry, caused him to burst out laughing; and this effectually put both into a good humor, which lasted, with but few interruptions, throughout the rest of the day.

On through Kingston and over the high-arched bridge—on by the wall and trees of Bushey Park—past the entrance to Hampton Court Palace—underneath the shadow of some mighty trees—and then round to an open green, to the river, and to a big old-fashioned inn, its walls all hanging with the blossoms of the wistaria.

"Have you courage to have luncheon in the ordinary coffee-room?" said he—as if she lacked courage for any thing!

"Certainly," she said. "I like to see people; and I am not afraid of meeting any one I know. Oh, I say, if Miss Main could only see me now!"

When they went into the coffee-room they found there only two old maiden ladies, having bread-and-cheese and lemonade, a Frenchman and his wife, who was much older than himself, and an old gentleman who had fallen asleep in his chair. They were therefore fortunate in being able to get a table at one of the windows, so that they could turn from the dull red carpet and white curtains of the room to the great glowing world outside. Violet was very grave while luncheon was being ordered. She expressed her preference for this or that with a serious frankness. She had the air of a young woman on her bridal-trip, who is above all things determined to appear indifferent and at her ease, so as to make the waiter believe that she has been married from time immemorial.

"Then," said he, when the waiter was gone, "you will take a little Champagne, won't you?"

"No, thank you," she said. "I like it, you know, especially if it is not too sweet; but I am not allowed to have any thing more than a glass of sherry."

"Who can prevent you now?" he asked.

"My own self-respect," she said, with great suavity. "Do you think I would take advantage of Miss Main behind her back?"

Luncheon was put on the table; and yet they could not bear to have the window shut down. Indeed, there was not much wind blowing in; for now the ominous black clouds in the south had cleared away; a clear blue sky shone over the still and fair landscape; the world lay in the peaceful light of a summer forenoon. Violet was most unmistakably hungry, but she gave her luncheon only a divided attention. She was continually turning to the sunlit picture outside, a soft and dreamy picture without sound. For there was the long blue sweep of the river—a pale steel-blue, here and there broken by a sharp line of white. Out in mid-stream the wind caught the surface, and ruffled it in to a darker blue; in under the soft green willows—which were glowing in the sunshine—there were smooth shadows of a cool, dark olive. On the one side, these willows and meadows; on the other, the ruddy road and corner by the Palace wall, with stately elms and chestnuts; in the far distance, a softly wooded landscape all shimmering in the light. Could one catch the sound of that boat coming round the sweeping curve—the sunshine sparkling on the wet blades of the oars? There was a flock of ducks swimming in a compact body against the gentle current. Far overhead a rook—grown small by the height—was making his way homeward through the blue.

"And who are these?" she said, looking down on some six or eight young men who were crossing the road from the inn and making for the green banks by the side of the river. They were carrying bottles and glasses, and most of them had lighted pipes or cigars.

"I should think they were the German fellows who were making such a noise up-stairs."

"I don't call part-singing noise," she retorted. "I wish they had gone on. I knew every song they sung."

"I have no doubt you would like to have gone and helped them," he said, not very graciously.

"I could have done that too," she replied, simply. "My singing is not said to be lovely by critics—envious critics, you know—but I am mad about German songs. Now look at that one who has lain down on his back, with his hat over his face: why doesn't he start a song? He isn't smoking, like the others."

"Perhaps you would like to go and ask him?" he suggested.

"I would, really," she replied, quite innocently. "You don't know how fond I am of the German choruses. Don't you know '*Gaudeamus?*'"

"If you would prefer to go and make the acquaintance of those gentlemen—"

"In the same manner I made yours?" she remarked.

"Do you mean that any one—" He was obviously getting annoyed again, and she interposed.

"There is nothing," she observed, "of gratitude in the human breast. Here have I run the risk of the most tremendous disgrace—worse than that, I suppose I shall have solitary confinement and bread and water for three months—all to give you the pleasure of my society for a few hours; and the return is that I am thwarthed, crushed, argufied at every turn—"

"You are likely to be crushed!" he said, laughing.

"Why, I only wanted them to sing some more songs to please you. I know the songs, every one of them, by heart. Why should I— Oh!"

She threw down her knife and fork, and clasped her hands together in delight.

"Don't you know what that is?"

One of the young fellows, lying stretched at full length on the grass, had been tapping time with his stick, on an empty bottle, to an imaginary tune. Then he had taken to whistling, which he suddenly abandoned in order to bawl out, in a strong, careless, deep bass voice,

"Was kommt dort von der Hoh',
Was kommt dort von der Hoh';"

and then the full chorus burst in upon him, not very musically, for some of the young men tried to keep their pipes in their mouths,

"Was kommt dort von der ledernen Hoh',
Sa, sa! ledernen Hoh',
Was kommt dort von der Hoh'!"

"Oh, you nice young men!" cried Violet North. "Oh, you nice young men, don't stop!"

But they did stop; the foxy chorus had less novelty for them than for her; and, in fact, this young fellow had bawled out a line or two of it out of pure idleness and laziness. Some talking ensued, with here and there a faintly heard burst of laughter. Suddenly the deep-voiced young man called-out,

"Es zogen drei Burschen wohl uber den Rhein,
Bei einer Frau Wirthin da kehrten sie ein,"

and there was another scramble for the chorus,

"Bei einer Frau Writhin da kehrten sie ein."

Every one knows that Uhland's story of the three students is among the most pathetic of ballads; but what pathos was there possible to those stalwart young fellows, with their lusty throats, their tobacco, and beer and wine? And yet the distance softened the sound; the beautiful air had its own message of sentiment with it. In the still sunshine, aud by the side of the cool river, the various voices seemed harmonious enough.

"Oh!" said Violet, "if they would only bestir themselves, and sing properly! I am sure they belong to some choral society. Why don't they sit up, and throw their nasty pipes into the river!"

Not they: they lay, and laughed, and sung snatches of chorus, idle as the summer day around them. Of course, they sung of the Lorelei, though there was here no gloomy and impending rock for the mystic maiden to sit on in the evening light, while the soft tones of her harp lured the mariner to his fate. They sung a *jodel* song, the *jodeler* having all the air to himself; the others merely chanting a rhythmic and deep accompaniment, as is the fashion of the Swiss workmen when they are walking home in the evening. They devoted themselves to a couple of drinking-songs, and then they got back to the region of sentiment with the Tyrolese lover's "Herzig's Schatzerl, lass dich herzen." Violet had been getting more and more impatient. She had finished her luncheon, or rather had neglected it for the singing, and the sunlight, and the green foliage without. She had not been a talkative companion.

"Can't we go out now?" she said.

"I suppose you want to get nearer to those German fellows?" said he.

"Yes," she answered. "I can not hear them very well at such a distance."

"Just as you like, then," said he, with no great warmth of assent. "Of course, we shall have to come back here."

She went to get her shawl, and then the two of them passed down the stairs together. Alas! what was that she heard as as she got into the hall? She could only hear the air; but she knew the words they were singing,

"Wohlauf, noch getrunken den funkelnden Wein!
Ade nun, ihr Bruder, geschieden muss sein."

Why "Ade!" just as she was coming out to see and hear something more of them? Indeed, when she went out to the front steps, the tall youths had all got to their feet, and a waiter was bringing back empty glasses and bottles.

"They are going," she said, with some disappointment.

"Yes," said he. "Did you think they were going to perform the part of Ethiopian serenaders the whole day?"

"What shall we do now?" she asked. Her musicians gone, she was indifferent.

"Let us go in and see the gardens, and the fountains, and the fish. Then there is the maze, you know."

"I have heard of that," she said, with some grandeur, "That is the place that maid-servants like to lose themselves in when they go out for a holiday. Thank you, we will do without the maze."

They went round and into the Palace, and, behold! before them were the German youths, straying about the courts, and apparently having continual trouble with their double eyeglasses. They were in the main stalwart, straight-limbed, good-looking young fellows, though they wore very light trousers, which were too short for them; and brilliant neck-ties, which a milliner's girl would have coveted; and had had their heads, to all appearance, shaved on some recent occasion. But Miss North seemed to take but little interest now in the young men; she scarcely noticed them.

Among the few visitors, however, who were walking in the gardens behind the Palace, there were two whom she did particularly notice, and that in a very curious and wistful fashion. These were an old blind man, with long snow-white hair, and a small girl, probably his grandchild, who was leading him about, and chattering to him about all the things she saw. Violet North and her companion were sitting on a seat which was in the cool shadow of a black yew-tree; and from this darkened place they could well see the blazing gardens all around them, and the bright figures that walked about in the sunshine. Wherever the old man and the child went, thither the eyes of Miss North followed them. How quiet the place was! the only sound that of the plashing of the fountains. The repose of the Old-World garden seemed to invite to thinking. There was a sleepiness about those dark yews that flung their black shadows on the burning greensward. It was a comfort to the eyes that those yellow and scarlet flower-beds, that flamed in the sunlight, were remote; here, close at hand, there was but the grateful shadow, and the dark-green under the branches, and the slumberous plashing of the waters.

"Do you see that little girl leading about the old man? She is describing to him every thing she sees—the gold-fishes in the pond, the butterflies, every thing. Do you know what I should do if I were that girl, and if he were my father?"

He looked at her; he had never heard her speak in this tone before.

"I should tell him lies!" she said, with sudden bitterness. "I should go and tell him lies, and deceive him, and take advantage of his blindness. And he would believe me; for how could he suspect that I would be so mean?"

"I—I don't understand you," said he.

"Well," she said, with a careless gesture, "we have had our holiday; never mind."

And yet her eyes still followed the old man and the child.

"I wonder," she said, absently, "whether, if you break the confidence people have in you, you can never restore it? Or is it all done for, and you can't go back?"

He looked at her once more: she was quietly crying.

"Violet!" said he, "what is the matter?"

"I am beginning to think what I have done, that is all," she said, trying to conceal her tears; "and it is never to be undone now. And all for what?—a drive and a look at some flowers; and now I can never look my father in the face again, nor the only friends I have in the world, nor Miss Main, nor any body."

"They—they needn't know," he said, hesitatingly.

"Don't I know myself?" she said, vehemently. "Can any thing be worse than that? And I never was so mean as to deceive any one before—and—oh! I can't bear to think of it!"

"You must not think so much of all this," said he soothingly. "The fact is, you are very proud, and what annoys you wouldn't disturb any body else. It was scarcely fair, I admit, to go and deceive those people, or rather let them deceive themselves; but, after all, it was only a bit of fun—"

"Yes," she said, rapidly. "It was that at the time—it was that all to-day—but, now that we have had our adventure, comes the price that has to be paid for it. Do you know what I would give to have those last few days cut out of my life altogether? That is the worst of it; you can not forget."

"It isn't so serious as all that," he pleaded.

"Not to you," she answered.

He certainly perceived that what delight was to come of this adventure had passed away. All the gay and careless audacity had fled from her manner; she seemed to be brooding over her self humiliation. It was no use arguing with her; she was much too sharp in her replies for him. He began to think they might as well drive back to London.

She pulled out her watch.

"Could your man get me up to London by half-past five?"

"Certainly, if you start now."

"And would you mind leaving me anywhere in the neighborhood of Euston Square? You can go home then, you know."

"But how about Miss Main?" said he, in surprise.

"Never mind her; I will arrange about that."

"All right," said he; "we must return to the inn at once."

It was a sultry afternoon as they drove back along the dusty highways to the great town they had left in the morning. A light brown haze had come over the sky; and the sun, that had got a coppery tinge, threw a curiously ruddy light on the highway, where the shadows of the trees were purple rather than grey. There was no wind now; the air seemed to choke one; the birds were hushed; everything promised thunder.

"You mean to go and see your father, I suppose?" said he.

"Yes," she said, firmly. "This at least I can do—I can go and confess to every one whom I have deceived, and ask their pardon—every one. What will they think of me afterward—well, I can not help that. I should have thought of that before undertaking this piece of folly."

"I don't see why you should bear all the blame, and take all the punishment," he said. "I will tell you what I will do, if you like: what if I go up to your father's with you, and tell him the whole story? I will if you like."

"You would?" she said, with her face brightening.

"Certainly."

"I like you for that," she said, frankly; "but, of course, I can not allow it. You had nothing to do with it at all. It isn't the mere running off for a day that I regret—that was mere stupidity—but the horrid cheating; it is that I can't get over—"

"That is merely because you are so proud."

"It does not matter how or why it is, so long as it is there. I am what I am; and I hate myself—I shall continue to hate myself until I have confessed the whole thing, and left it with them to forgive me or not, as they please And if they do, will they ever be able to forget? No, no: this piece of fun—of ridiculous nonsense—has done something that is not to be undone, I know that."

"Come, I say," he remonstrated, "you are really taking the thing too much to heart. Is there no sort of condoning a mistake in the world? Is every thing you do to stick to you forever? I think that would be uncommonly hard."

"Tell your man to go as fast as he can:" that was all the answer she made; and yet it was said wistfully, so that he took no offense.

In due course of time they got up into the hot air of London: the ominous sky was clearing, but the sultry closeness still remained. When they reached the neighborhood of

Euston Square she asked to be set down; and then she held out her hand, and bid him good-by.

"When am I to see you again?" he asked, rather timidly.

"Perhaps never," she answered; and then she added, with a smile, "Don't ask me to make any more appointments at present. There has been enough mischief out of that."

"I mean to see you soon," said he, with some firmness; and then he drove away.

She walked up to the door of her father's house, and rang the bell. Her heart was beating violently.

"Is Sir Acton at home, George?"

"Yes, miss," answered the man; and then she walked in and through the hall.

She found her father in a room the walls of which were almost covered with plans and maps, while the table was littered with all manner of papers. When he looked up it was clear that his mind was deeply engaged on some project, for he betrayed no surprise at finding her standing there.

"Well, Violet, well?" he said, absently. "I well see you at dinner: go away now, like a good girl."

If he was not surprised to find her there, he was sufficiently startled by what followed. Before he knew how it all happened, he found the girl down on her knees beside him, hiding her head in his lap, and crying wildly and bitterly. What could it all mean? He began to recollect that his daughter had not been expected to dinner.

"My girl, my girl, what is all this about?" said he.

She told him, with many sobs, the whole story—every particular of it, and eagerly putting the whole blame on herself. To tell the truth, Sir Acton was not so very much shocked; but, then, the story told by herself would have sounded differently had it reached him as a rumor at second-hand.

"That is all, then?" said he. "You have just come back from that foolish excursion? Well, well, you did right to come to me. Just let me see what's to be done: but you did right to come to me."

Perhaps at the moment some notion flashed across his mind that he had not quite given the girl that measure of paternal advice and protection which was her due. Nor, indeed, was it easy for him to say off-hand what he should do now; for his mind was still filled with particulars of a Canadian railway, and there was scarcely room for the case of this runaway school-girl.

"Bless my soul, now," said he, "I—I don't know what we had better do—"

"Oh, papa!" she cried, with the beautiful dark eyes still wet with tears, looking up imploringly to his face, "take me with you to Canada! I asked you on Saturday; and if you had said yes then, I should have been so happy! I want to go away from England—I hate England—I don't care how long you are away, papa, won't you take me with you to Canada?"

He put his hand on her head; was there some look of her mother in those earnest, entreating eyes?

"I will do any thing you really wish, Violet," he said, hurriedly. "But you don't know what this means. I may be away longer then I expect at present—perhaps eighteen months or two years."

"Oh, papa, that is just what I want—to be away for a long, long time, or altogether—"

"But the traveling, Violet. We should have to be continually traveling immensely long distances, with little time for amusement and sight-seeing. And we should occasionally get into places where the hotel accommodation would doubtless frighten a London-bred young lady."

"It won't frighten me," she said; and there was a happy light shining through her tears; for had he not used the word "we?"

He got up and began to walk about the room: she stood for a minute or two irresolute, and then she went to him, and put her head in his bosom, so that he put his arms round her.

"Papa, I will be such a good companion to you! I will copy all your letters for you, and I will get up in the morning and see that the people have your breakfast for you, and I will take charge of all your clothes and your papers, and every thing. And I don't want to go sight-seeing—I would far rather see railways, and coal-mines, and engine-houses; and I don't need any outfit, for I can wear the dresses I have; and if there is any great expense, papa, you might give me ten pounds a year less until you make it up—"

At this he burst out laughing; but it was rather a gasping sort of laugh, and there was just a trace of moisture in his eyes as he patted her head.

"I think we might scrape together the few pounds for your traveling without starving you," said he.

"Then you will let me go with you?" she cried, raising her head, with a great delight shining in her face.

He nodded assent. Then she put her arms round his neck and pulled down his head, and said,

"I have something to whisper to you, papa. It is that I love you; and that there is no other papa like you in the whole world."

"Ah, well," said he, when she had released him, "that being settled, what do you propose now, Miss Violet?"

"Oh," she said, "now I have confessed every thing to you, and you have been so good to me, I am not so anxious about other people; but still I have to go and beg them to forgive me too—and I will go on my knees to them all, if they wish; and then, papa, I must tell Miss Main that I am going to Canada. When do we go, papa?"

"Will three weeks hence be too soon for you?"

"Three days wouldn't."

"Then, between a fortnight and three weeks."

She was so overjoyed and grateful that she gladly consented to stay to dinner—a telegram having been sent to Miss Main—and she even condescended to be civil to Lady North and to her rather ugly half-sisters. After dinner she was sent over to the school in her father's brougham.

She made her peace with Miss Main, though that lady was sore distressed to hear that she was about to leave the school and go to Canada. Then she went up to her own room.

She threw open the window. It had now begun to rain; and there were sweet, cool winds about. In the dim orange twilight of a solitary candle, she got out of her trunk the leaves of her MS. novel, and these she deliberately tore to pieces.

"You sham stuff, that is an end of you!" she seemed to say; "you must pack off, along with plenty of other nonsense. I have done with that now; you were good enough as the amusement of a school-girl. The school-girl casts you aside when she steps into the life of A WOMAN."

CHAPTER VIII.

ENGLAND, FAREWELL!

"WHEN does she go?" asked James Drummond of his sister. He was rather moodily staring out of window.

"To-morrow they go down to Southampton; and I think they sail next day. All the school is in a terrible way about it; Amy has been having little fits of crying by herself these two or three days back. She says that the whole of the girls came and asked Violet for some little keepsake—and of course she would part with her head if it was asked of her—and now they mean to present her with some book or other, with their names written in it. Dear, dear me, what will our Amy do! I am glad she had sufficient sense not to accept Violet's watch—the notion of one girl coolly offering another a gold watch!"

"We shall miss her too," Mr. Drummond said; he was apparently not overjoyed at Violet North's approaching departure.

He turned impatiently from the window.

"Do you know," said he—with a look of anger which would have frightened any body but his sister, who knew his ways—"do you know what mischief is likely to be done the girl by this two years' trip? Look at her now—a wild, headstrong, audacious school-girl just entering the period in which her character as a woman will be formed. And this moment, instead of letting some soft womanly hand smooth down the angles of her character—instead of submitting her to all sorts of gentle influences, which would teach her something of the grace and sweetness of a woman—they carry her off among a mob of railway directors, with their harsh, mechanical ways, and their worship of money, and their loud and bragging self-importance. Why, the girl will come back to England, if ever she comes back, worse than ever."

"Do you think her so very bad at present?" Mrs. Warrener remonstrated, gently. "I thought you were very fond of her."

"And I am," he answered. "And there is a great deal about her that is to me intensely interesting, and even fascinating; while there is much that can only be tolerated in the hope that years will eradicate it. It was all very well to be amused by her rude frankness, her happy thoughtlessness, and that sort of romantic affectation she sometimes played with while she was a school-girl; but would you like to see all these things in the woman?"

"She must grow wiser as she grows older," his sister said, fighting a losing battle in defense of her friend.

"No doubt; but will she grow gentler, sweeter, more womanly? Her father, I dare say, thinks he is doing her a kindness; he is doing her a great injury."

"You don't like to part with her, James," his sister said, with a smile.

"Certainly I don't. I had some notion of asking her father to let her come and stay with us when she left school, and she was bound to leave it soon. If we could have got her with us to the Highlands, and kept her there for a couple of months, she would have got familiarized with us, and staid on indefinitely."

Mrs. Warrener was quite as impulsively generous as her brother; but she had to do with housekeeping books and tradesmen's bills; and she ventured to hint that the addition of another member to their household would affect their expenditure to a certain degree. He would not hear of that. The frugal manner in which they lived surely left them some margin for acts of friendliness; and if Violet North were to come to live with them, she was not the sort of girl to expect or appreciate expensive living.

"But there is no use talking of it," he said, with a sigh. "When she comes back, we shall see what sort of woman she is."

"That is part of your regret," said his shrewd sister. You were always interested in the girl—watching her, questioning her, studying her—and now, just as the study was about to reach its most interesting point, she is seized and carried off. Perhaps it will not turn out so badly for her, after all: I am sure I hope so, for I can not help loving the girl, though she has never been a good example to set before our little Amy."

"I think," said Drummond, suddenly, "I should like to go down to Southampton and see her off. The poorest emigrant has friends to go and bid him good-bye. I doubt whether she will have a single creature to shake hands with her the day after to-morrow."

"Won't Mr. Miller be there?" his sister suggested.

"No: when he learned that she had promised neither to see him nor to write to him before leaving, he very fairly said that he would not try to get her to do either. And it was very straightforward of that young fellow to go up to her father and ask his pardon. I think we must get him over to dinner in a day or two."

"Yes," said his sister, with a smile, "now they have taken Violet away from you, you can begin and dissect him."

"There is more commonplace material there," said Drummond, indifferently, as he went away to get a railway time-table.

And now the hour came at which Violet North had to leave that tall house in Camberwell Grove which had been her home for many a day; and there was her father's brougham at the door, and a cab to take her small store of worldly possessions. The girls had begged leave to go out into the bit of front garden to see her off: she came down among them, and there was a great deal of hand-shaking, and kissing, and "Good-bye, Violet," going on. It was a trying moment. For these last two weeks she had been released from all tasks; and had already assumed the airs of a woman. She had been very dignified and gracious with her former companions—a little conscious of superiority, and proud of Miss Main's proffered society and counsel; and inclined at times to beg of this or that girl to be a little less unruly, and a little more mindful of the proper demeanor of a young lady. Now she was only Violet North again. Her attempt at playing the woman quite broke down; she was crying bitterly as she got into the carriage, where she huddled herself away ignominiously into a corner, and hid herself from the eyes of her companions, who were waving their handkerchiefs after her.

But she was not crying when she stood on the white decks of the great steamer, and watched the last preparations being made for leaving England. It was a brilliant and beautiful forenoon, the sun scattering millions of diamonds on the slight ripples of the water, a fair blue sky overhead. She was proud, glad, impatient to be off: the new excitement had brought such a color to her face and such a brightness to her eyes, that several of the passengers looked at this remarkably handsome girl and hoped she was not merely a visitor.

"I must be getting ashore now," said Mr. Drummond to her; and then he added, with the old friendly smile, "Are you sure you have no other message than those you have given me?"

"Do you mean for Mr. Miller?" she asked, looking down; and then, as he did not answer, she continued, "Yes, I have. Tell him I am obliged to him for all the fun and mischief I had; but that is all over now. Oh, Mr. Drummond, isn't it fine to be able to cut off all that, and get away quite free? I am so glad to be going! And when you see me again, I shall be quite a reformed character."

"Good-bye, Sir Acton. Good-bye, Violet: don't you forget to write to us."

Shyly, like a school-girl, she took his hand; and yet she held it for a moment, and her voice rather faltered as she spoke:

"Good-bye. You have been kind to me. Try not to—to think badly of me. And—and indeed you have been so kind to me!"

Two or three hours afterward, all that Violet North could see of England was a long, low line of blue, with here and there an indication of white; and now it seemed to her that she did not hate her native country at all. That is what distance does for us; the harsh and bitter features of this or that experience are slowly obliterated, and memory begins to look kindly on the past. England was to her no longer a place of squalid streets and noisy harbors, of smoke, and bustle, and din; but the fair old mother-county, proud and honorable, the beloved of many poets, the home to which the carrier-pigeon of the imagination was sure to return with swift wings from any other point of the earth. She had been glad to get away from England; yet already her heart yearned back to the old, joyous, mischievous life she had led, and it did not seem wretched at all. The new dignity of woman's estate did not wholly console her; for now she was crying just like any school-girl, and, like a school-girl, she would accept of no comfort in her misery.

CHAPTER IX.

CŒLUM NON ANIMUM.

Sir Acton North had early in life arrived at the conclusion that women were, on the whole, inexplicable creatures, who lived in a region of sentiment into which no man had ever entered, and who had all kinds of fancies and feelings which no man could possibly fathom. But because he could not understand these strange notions, did he consider them preposterous? Not at all. He took them on trust, for the very reason that he could not guess at their origin. He was most considerate toward those women with whom he had dealings: it was enough for him that they did believe so and so, and did feel this or that; he had long ago given up all notion of trying to comprehend their sentiments; and, in short, he simply accepted their reports. Take, for example, the relations between Violet North and her step-mother. Why, he asked himself, could not these two people live in the same house together and be decently civil to each other? The answer was that they were women—they had "sympathies," "antipathies," "secret repugnances," and all the rest of it, which were no doubt of great importance to themselves, but were a trifle unintelligible to others. He himself, now, when a young man, had shared his room with this or that acquaintance, whose habits and opinions were very different from his own; but did they quarrel? No; they were two men; they had something else to think of than studying those niceties of manner and expression that seemed to make women either love each other or hate each other, as the chance might be. Had he not had to work in daily association with many a man whose appearance, and dress, and habit of speech—in fact every thing about him—betokened mingled coarseness and meanness; and yet when did either of them find the other's presence in a room an insupportable outrage on the feelings? Women were strange creatures; but they had to be leniently dealt with; for, after all, these peculiar fancies of theirs were doubtless of importance to themselves.

Sir Acton loyally carried out this theory, especially with regard to his wife and daughters. At the present moment he was hampering in a serious manner the performance of his duties in Canada, merely because a school-girl had besought him to take her away from England for eighteen months or a couple of years. He did not understand why Violet should hate England, or be so anxious to leave it. He knew she had committed some school-girl indiscretions; but surely every school-girl did not get into such a passion of remorse when found out in a fault? However, here was his eldest daughter crying, sobbing, imploring to be taken with him to Canada; and so he took her.

Nor was he surprised that the moment she left England she should begin to be very sorrowful and filled with a longing regret. That was only another instance of the unintelligible working of the feminine emotions. He cheered her as well as he could; and tried to interest her in the details of the voyage. Fortunately they had a fine passage; there were some agreeable people on board; and Miss North speedily regained her ordinary gayety of spirits. When they landed on the shores of what was to her a new and wonderful country, moreover, she was full of high expectation. She proved, as she promised to be, an excellent traveling-companion. She was equal to any amount of fatigue—indeed, the girl had a constitution as tough as his own. She made light of delays and inconveniences; she saw every thing that was tolerably pleasant through rose-colored spectacles; such things as were beautiful or delightful provoked an admiration which pleased her father, because it was obviously flavored with gratitude. Then there was something on the other side. They were not always inspecting valleys, surveying plains, and studying maps. There was pauses of social enjoyment; and Sir Acton North, in taking about with him his daughter, was not at all averse to showing some of his old acquaintances what an English girl was like. And among those families were there not a few young men who secretly admired and longed—who wondered whether it was not possible to fascinate, delay, and subsequently capture this beautiful bird of passage? Doubtless; but their wiles were of no avail. She was too busy, eager, and happy—too gay and self-reliant of heart—to attend to imploring glances and sighs. If she had, in resolving to become a woman, thrown aside much of the fractious impatience and rude frankness of her school-girl days, she still retained a gracious dignity—a certain lofty audacity of pride in herself—that would not at all permit that she should be trifled with. Those young gentlemen were not aware that she had just been released from school, or doubtless they would have been sufficiently surprised by the fashion in which a school-girl could assume all the self-reliant dignity of a woman, keeping them, more especially, in their proper place.

But even Sir Acton's placid concurrence in the vagaries of the feminine nature would have been startled if he had known the sentiment that was gradually growing up during all this time in his daughter's heart. It had been symbolized in a measure by the manner of her leaving England. She was glad to get away from the squalor, the din, the bustle of the sea-port town from which they sailed; but by-and-by all those objectionable things were forgotten, and, looking back, she only saw her own beautiful England. So now all the harsh aspects and humiliating circumstances of the old life she had cried to get away from were forgotten; and she looked back to the small circle of friends she had known with a tender and wistful regret. She grew to think there was no place in all the world so quiet, and homely, and beautiful as that little garden behind James Drummond's house in Camberwell Grove. The people around her did all they could to please her and amuse her; but they were only acquaintances; her friends were back in that old and yet never-forgotten time which was becoming so dear to her. She had indeed succeeded in putting a great chasm between her and that bygone time. England was not half so far away from her as were her school-girl days. But did she cease to care for the old time, and for the friends she knew then? Not much. Both had grown dearer to her, as England had grown dearer to her; and many a night, when a great lambent planet was shining in the northern sky, she looked up, and her heart said to it, "Ah, how happy you must be; for you are able to look across the waters and see my England!"

And as for him who had been her companion in that adventure which was the main cause of her exile? Well, he underwent transformation too. First of all, she was considerably ashamed of the whole affair; and did not like to think of him. Then she began to look upon that episode in a sort of half-humorous way; she would smile to herself in reflecting on her own folly, and perhaps wonder what he was now thinking of it all. But as the days, and the weeks, and the months went by—as the continual succession of actual lakes, and mountains, and pine-woods made England look more and more visionary and remote—so that little adventure came to be regarded as the only bit of romance that had ever occurred to her, and she thought of the bright May-day as belonging to a past spring-time not to be recalled in the life of a woman. He, too; had he not been made the victim of her petulant caprice? Had he not manfully gone and taken the blame of that for which he was in no wise reponsible? And did he sometimes think of her now?

For a long time she never mentioned him in her letters. One day, she put a timid little postscript at the end of the last page—she was writing to Mrs Warrener—and this was what she asked, in a half-comical way:

"Do you ever see my youthful sweetheart now? What a long time it seems since we made fools of ourselves! I suppose he has quite forgotten me by this time; and as for me, I can scarcely remember what he was like, except that he had wavy light-brown hair, which I thought very lovely and quite Adonis-looking. Sometimes I dream that I am caught in some awful piece of mischief, and Miss Main is setting me three pages of 'Telemaque' to write out."

It was a casual and apparently a careless question; but somehow the answer was looked for. And that came from Mr. Drummond himself, who described, in his rambling, odd, jocular fashion, the evening which Mr. George Miller had spent at his house the very night before. The girl dwelt long over that pleasant little picture; until she was more ready than ever to cry out, "How very happy the stars must be, because they can see my England!"

CHAPTER X.

A MESSAGE HOME.

England, meanwhile, had not remained stationary merely because Violet North had left it. The little world in which she had lived still wagged on in its accustomed way, bringing all manner of changes, big and little, to the people she had known.

First of all, Mr. Drummond had finally completed his scheme for a great work to which he meant to devote the following winter. He had developed many such schemes before; and he had always been looking forward to a winter's serious work; but somehow the big project generally dwindled down to the dimensions of a magazine article, and even that was sometimes too whimsical and perverse for the most patient of editors. However, this time he was resolved to get the thing done; and so he went to a publisher whom he knew, carrying with him a few slips containing the outlines of his projected book. The publisher's face grew more and more puzzled as he looked at the following title and table of contents:

ON A PROPOSAL TO WHITEWASH THE OUTSIDE OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

Sub-head 1.—The General Properties and History of Whitewash.

Section I. On Expiatory Punishments.

Section II. Remarks on Modern Estimates of Judas Iscariot, Nero, Henry VIII., and Torquemada.

Section III. Whitecross Street.

Section IV. On those retrospective marriage laws which clear the character of illegitimate children.

Section V. On tombstone inscriptions.

Sub-head 2.—The Interior of Westminster Abbey.

Section I. On Exploded Reputations.

Section II. Three questions propounded: (1) Is it possible for the disembodied spirit to be present at the funeral of his own body? (2) Is it possible for a disembodied spirit to blush? (3) Is it probable that, on several occasions, disembodied spirits may have been present in Westminster Abbey, and blushed to find their own bodies being buried there?

Section III. On the Dean of Westminster as a collector of curiosities.

Section IV. On the possibility of a Dean of Westminster becoming possessed of the evil eye, and therefore able to secure celebrities for his collection before the proper time.

Section V. A proposal for a Junior Westminster Abbey: the occupants of the present Abbey to retire by rotation: vacancies to be filled up from the Junior.

The publisher got no further than that. His brain was in a whirl, and he sought safety by getting back to the initial point of his perplexity.

"God bless my soul!" he cried, "what do you mean, Drummond? To whitewash Westminster Abbey? Why, the public wouldn't hear of such a thing. It would be an outrage—a barbarism. I never heard of such a notion!"

A quick, strange, bewildered look came into Drummond's eyes; he looked at the publisher in a puzzled way.

"You don't—see—that it is a joke," said he.

"A joke! Is all this meant to be a joke? Do you think the public would read a joke extending to five hundred pages?"

"Confound them, they read many a five hundred pages without any joke in them at all," said Drummond.

"My dear fellow!" said the publisher, with a friendly and condescending smile, "why, God bless my soul! who could be amusing for five hundred pages?"

"There are many folks amusing all their life-long," retorted Drummond, though he was rather disappointed. "What they are after, goodness only knows. Perhaps they have the fun taken out of them *then*."

"Take my advice, Drummond," said his friendly adviser. "Don't waste your time over this. If it were a real piece of history, now, you know—something nice and picturesque about the Abbey itself, and the great heroes there—with a good dash of patriotism, and religious feeling, and that kind of thing—then the public would look at it. But a joke! and a joke about Westminster Abbey of all places in the world!"

"I meant no disrespect to the Abbey, I am sure," said Drummond, humbly.

"No, no," said his friend; "don't waste your time on that."

James Drummond went home crest-fallen to his sister: he was sure of sympathy and admiration from his unfailing audience of one.

"They won't have it, Sarah."

"And why?"

"Because the public wouldn't see it was meant as a joke; and then, if they did, they would take it as an insult. By heavens!" he added, savagely, "I wish all the publishers were buried in the Abbey, and that I had to write an inscription over their common tomb!"

"What would you say?"

He stood uncertain for a moment.

"I think," he said, slowly, "I can not do better than go and compose that inscription. As a great favor I will show it to any publisher who makes the application. It is not every one who can tell before his death what his tombstone is going to say after that event. Sarah, don't come in to disturb me until I have finished my eulogium on the departed race of publishers."

So that was all that came at the moment of Mr. Drummond's great project; and Mrs. Warrener was once more defeated in her desire to be able to write out to Violet North that her friend had become famous. For, of course, whatever Mr. Drummond's own notions on the subject were, his sister was convinced that he was failing in his duty so long as he did not achieve a great reputation; and of his capacity to do that she had no doubt whatever.

Events had moved in a more marked way with Mr. George Miller—"Young Miller," as Drummond now familiarly called him. In the first place, his father had bought for him a comfortable partnership which did not make too severe a call upon his time; and the young gentleman having thus started in the world for himself, preferred to leave the paternal roof and take up his lodging in Half Moon Street, where he had a couple of sufficiently pleasant rooms. Then he had gained admittance to a small but very gorgeous club in Piccadilly, the mere staircase of which would have justified his paying double the entrance fee demanded. This, about the most westerly in position of the well-known clubs was about the most easterly in the character of its members. It used to be said that the lost tribes of Israel had suddenly turned up in that imposing building, and that, as a consequence, the steward had to excise bacon from his daily bill of fare; but these rude jokes came with an ill grace from the young gentleman of the Stock Exchange whose ancestry was much more thoroughly missing than the lost tribes had been. Of course, these two classes did not make up the membership of the club. Far from it. There was just as large a proportion as in other clubs of gentlemen who could not have earned a penny (except at pool) to save their lives—if that could fairly be regarded as an inducement; gentlemen whose ancestors had condescended to do nothing for five centuries, and who were, in consequence, regarded with great respect. There were lawyers, doctors, bill-discounters, clergymen—in short, all the ordinary constituents of a non-political club; and there were one or two authors, who were occasionally asked at the last moment to join this or that little dinner party, because they were devilish amusing fellows, and good for no end of jokes you know.

Now, Mr. George Miller had become very friendly with James Drummond; and on several occasions the latter had been induced to dine at this club—let us call it the Judæum, for distinction's sake—with his newly-made acquaintance. Mr. Drummond, during these evenings, grew more and more to wonder at the extraordinary knowledge of the world which this young man had picked up. It was not a knowledge of human nature; but a knowledge of the facts and circumstances of the life around him—of the petty ambitions of this man, of how the next made his money, of the fashion in which the other inpecunious person contrived to make both ends meet by shifting his lodgings from time to time. Mr. Drummond perceived that young Miller was an ingenuous youth; but how had he picked up this familiarity with the ways of the world, which, after all, had its value as a species of education? Mr. Drummond was well content to sit and listen to the young man. What he heard did not edify him; but it interested him in a way. Moreover, there was no arrogance of superior knowledge about the young man. On the contrary, he was still the humble scholar and disciple of this whimsical master; and was greatly pleased when Gamaliel invited him to spend an evening in the solitudes of that southern mountain, where he metaphorically sat at the feet of the teacher, and listened with much apparent interest to monologues, not one-fifth part of which he could in anywise understand.

They were an oddly assorted couple of friends. But if Mr. Miller found himself at a marked disadvantage while his teacher was idly roaming over the fields of philosophy, art, and letters, culling a flower here and there, and expounding its hidden virtues, he, on the other hand, was much more at home than Drummond was in railway-stations, restaurants, hansom-cabs, and what not. Young Miller "knew his way about," as the saying is. When he paid his money, he got his money's worth. He smiled blandly at the pretenses of begging impostors; he was not born yesterday. If there was a crush at a train, Mr. Drummond would give way to the noisy and blustering person who hustled past him—

would stand aside, indeed, in mild wonder over the man's manners; but young Miller did not see the fun of being imposed on in that fashion. His elbows were as sharp as any man's; his head as good a battering-ram as another's; if it cost him twenty hats, he would not be deprived of his just rights.

One evening they were dining together in a quiet way at the Judæum. While they were talking, the waiter had opened a bottle of Champagne, and filled their glasses. The moment Miller tasted the wine, he perceived that it was wholly different from that he had ordered, and, summoning the waiter, he asked him what the wine was. The man remembered the order, and saw his mistake in a moment—he could only look in a helpless fashion at the destroyed bottle.

"Take it away and bring what I ordered."

When he had gone, Mr. Miller said,

"Now that will teach that fellow to be a little more careful; that's eight shillings he has lost by his blunder."

The waiter, not looking very radiant, came back with the proper wine, and the dinner went on.

"What wages will that man have?" said Drummond. He, too, seemed a little depressed.

"I don't know; probably a guinea a week, and his board and clothes."

"He may have a wife to keep, perhaps?"

"Possibly he may."

"Perhaps she may have children and a small household to support on that guinea a week?"

"Very likely."

Drummond remained silent for some little time; he was not getting on well with his dinner. At last he fairly flung down his knife and fork, and pushed away his plate.

"Miller, this dinner sticks in my throat!"

The younger man looked up amazed.

"What is it?"

"I can't sit eating and drinking here, with that unfortunate devil robbed of more than a third of his week's earnings. I can't do it—"

"Is it the waiter? Why, my dear fellow, I will put that right in a moment."

He would do any thing to please his friend, of course. He called the waiter and told him to have the rejected bottle of wine added to the dinner-bill; the man went away with more gratitude in his face than he dared express in words.

"But it is very wrong," said young Miller, gravely. "You see you don't understand these things, Drummond—you don't like to have men treated like machines—and yet if you let fine feelings come into the management of a club, you'll simply have bad, and careless, and even impertinent servants. There's nothing like letting them suffer the consequences of their own mistakes. Haven't we to do the same? And who pities us? Now, isn't there common sense in that?"

"Oh yes, there's a deal of common sense in that," said Drummond, in a dry and serious tone which always irritated his companion, who never could tell whether it did not conceal some trace of sarcasm.

"My dear fellow," continued Miller—he was pleased to be able to play Gamaliel himself at times—" the moment you break in on strict discipline, it is all over with servants in a club. I remember a pretty instance of what follows from familiarity, and friendly feeling, and that kind of thing. We had an Oxford parson here—one of the new school, you know—felt hat, thick walking-stick, long tramps, a hail-fellow-well-met sort of fellow, you know, and a devil to smoke pipes—and he used to interest himself in the affairs of the waiters, and chat with them about their wives and families. Well, look here. He was in the smoking-room one evening—"

The face of Mr. Miller had grown properly solemn. He was really anxious to impress on his friend the true principles of governing waiters.

"He was in the smoking-room one evening, and we were all round the fire, and he wanted a light. A waiter had brought up some things—I suppose he was one of his pets—and he asked this waiter to bring him a light. There were no matches on the table; and what does this fellow do but take out a match-box of his own, get hold of a wax-match, strike it on the heel of his boot—*on the heel of his boot*—and hand it over to the parson!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Drummond, with an awe-struck face. "And what happened? Did the earth open and swallow up that fearful man?"

"Oh, you think it is a joke," said young Miller, rather nettled; "I don't, anyway. If one of my father's servants did that to me, I can tell you he wouldn't be three minutes in the house. And no servant would do it, mind you, if he hadn't been made careless and cheeky by overfamiliarity. By-the-way, Lady North is an uncommon good one to look after her servants."

"Lady North?" said Drummond, with a stare.

"Yes," said Mr. Miller, with complacency. "Oh, I forgot to tell you, I fancy, how I ran across them at a picnic at Twickenham; and the girls are very plain, don't you see, and nobody was attending to them much; and so I became very good friends with them, mother and all."

"Was this another of your deeply laid schemes?" said Drummond, with a smile; thinking of the ingenuous way in which the young man had made his acquaintance.

"No, it was not, upon my honor," said Miller. "I knew they were to be there; and probably I should not have gone if I had not known; but the invitation was sent to me without any asking or arrangement on my part, and Lady North is not a bad sort of a woman. I dined with the family and one or two friends the other evening. She is rather cut and dried you know, and she has remarkably sharp gray eyes—by jove! I can tell you, the servants won't have much of a fling in that house. The girls are very plain—very; the eldest, Anatolia, has taken rather a fancy to me, I believe—oh, you needn't laugh; it is no great compliment, I assure you."

And so he let the garrulous boy run on, not more amused by his ingenuous confessions than by the shrewd, keen, practical estimates of men and things he had by hap hazard formed. If Mr. Drummond had had the honor of Lady North's acquaintance, he would probably have taken a couple of months to form a judgment about her; and that judgment would have been founded on all sorts of speculations with regard to her birth, education, temperament, early life, and present ambitions. Young Miller, on the other hand, had seen her but twice or thrice; he positively knew nothing about her; but he hit on a very shrewd guess as to her ways, and he managed to convey to his friend a pretty clear picture of the short, fair, dignified, stupid, but well-meaning woman, whose excessive literalness, and consequent suspicion—for suspicion is the substitute employed by people who lack imagination and clear perception—had almost driven her step-daughter crazy.

"And what about Vi—about Miss North?" said James Drummond, rather hesitatingly. "When do they expect her home?"

"I don't think the lovely Anatolia is anxious for that event, for the chances of her ever getting married won't be improved; but she says her eldest sister, as she invariably calls her, is coming home very soon now. Why, it is nearly two years since she left! I wonder what she will be like."

"What she will be like? That is easily answered. What she will be, that is of more importance," said Drummond, and for a second or two he sat silent. "She will have grown a woman since you saw her."

"But you don't suppose any body changes completely in a couple of years?" exclaimed Miller.

"Oh no, not completely," said his companion, rather absently. "What will she be like? Well, in appearance very much what she was—a little more brave and self-possessed in manner, probably, as becomes a woman. And doubtless she will be handsomer than ever. But as to what sort of a woman she has become by this time—who can tell?"

"Oh, I don't suppose there can be much difference," said young Miller, impatiently.

His friend smiled good-naturedly.

"You boys!" he said. "It is always the one notion you have got into your head. You hope she has remained the same, that you may resume that piece of romanticism that was so cruelly broken off. Isn't that it?"

"Well?" said the young man, ingenuously and modestly.

"You think the school-girl is coming back to play at sweethearting again? I am afraid you will be disappointed. A girl grows so terribly—in experience, in character, in aims—between seventeen and twenty! Do you know, Miller, that you will have to introduce yourself to a new Miss North?"

"I don't believe it," said the other. "How can you tell? Because she has written clever letters? But every body is formal in letters; and I don't suppose she talks like that."

"I don't suppose she does," said Drummond, apparently thinking of something very far away from that dinner-table; and so the subject dropped for the moment.

As they were walking along Piccadilly that night, Miller said,

"I hear that Sir Acton North is a very rich man."

"I suppose he is," Drummond answered.

"He has got an uncommonly fine collection of pictures; at least so one or two of the people there the other evening were saying. I'm not up to that sort of thing. By Jove! if I had his money, I shouldn't spend it on pictures and live in Euston Square. How much do you think he will give his eldest daughter when she marries?"

Drummond burst out laughing.

"What an extraordinary question! Do you think life is long enough to let one speculate on conundrums like that?

What possible interest could I have in making guesses as to Violet North's fortune?"

But he suddenly recollected himself. He looked at his companion with a sort of surprised curiosity in his eyes.

"Oh, I see: you—do you expect to have an interest in that question?"

"I say nothing about myself," said the younger man, rather peevishly. "What harm is there in asking what money a girl is likely to have? Of course, I expect the girl I shall marry, whoever she may be, to have some money. I shall have some. There is no great mercenariness about that, is there? It appears to me reasonable enough. You seem to think that any one on this side of thirty must have his head stuffed full of romance and trash. Well, I don't make any pretense of that kind. I think it is a fair bargain—you bring so much money into the affair, and I don't see why the girl shouldn't also—just as the woman of the poorer classes bring a chest of drawers and some blankets. It makes a woman far more independent, too. She can indulge in expensive tastes, and charity, and all that, without feeling that she is drawing too hard on her husband. Now what do you say to that?"

"Oh, nothing," said Drummond. "It is reasonable."

"Yes, I think it is reasonable," said young Miller, rather warmly. "And don't you think a reasonable woman would have the same notions? A school-girl, of course, is all for love and love's sake alone, and moonlight, and rope-ladders. A sensible woman knows the cost of a house in Hyde Park Square, and is precious glad to have two incomes instead of one for her family."

"And then, you see, Violet North is coming back a sensible woman, not a school-girl," remarked Mr. Drummond, kindly bringing these various statements to a legitimate conclusion.

"Oh, I didn't quite mean that," said the younger man. "not at all. I was only saying that when I married I should not be at all offended if the girl had a little money of her own. I don't suppose I am more mercenary than other people; but I see what the effect is of starting a house and family on the income that was all very well for a bachelor's rooms."

"Quite right; quite right."

Now there was nothing that Mr. Miller disliked so much as being dismissed in this fashion when he was trying to engage his newly formed acquaintance in talk. James Drummond scarcely ever agreed with any body; and when he briefly said, "All right," or "Very well; quite true," it was a sure sign that he simply would not take the trouble to enter into the subject. Fortunately, at this moment they had just got to the corner of Half Moon Street; so they separated, and Drummond got into a hansom and made for home.

It was about a fortnight after this evening that young Miller found himself the guest of Mr. Drummond; and the small circle—which now included little Amy Warrener, who had become almost a young lady—was listening to the disquisitions of a philosopher who shall be nameless. He was laboring to prove—or, rather, he was dogmatically asserting—that the happy man was he who could forget the past and disregarded the future, fixing his attention on the occupation of the moment, and taking such joys as came in his way with a light heart. Why think of the long drive home if you are at the theatre? Why think of the next day's awakening and work, if you are spending a pleasant evening? The philosopher in question maintained that this banishment of anticipation was a habit which could be cultivated; and that a wise man would resolve to acquire so invaluable a habit.

"And then," said he, contradicting himself with happy carelessness, "what are the joys of the moment to your expectations of them? Put them well on ahead; give yourself up to imagining them; and you will reap the value of them twenty times over before they arrive. We, for example, mean to go up again to the Highlands this autumn—"

Here a young lady clapped her hands with joy.

"—and at the present moment the Highlands are a greater delight to me than they will be then. I can defy those rushing butchers' carts, those inhuman organ-men, the fear of formal calls, by jumping off into the Highlands, and becoming a savage—a real out-and-out savage, careless of wind and rain and sunlight, and determined to slay all the wild animals I can find in a day's tramping over the heather—"

"Have you much game in that place?" asked the practical Mr. Miller.

"Plenty!" cried Mrs. Warrener, with a cruel frankness. "But he never hits any thing. I believe we should never have a bird or a hare except for old Peter."

"Libels—mere libels," said the philosopher, returning to his subject. "Now just think of the delight—here in this howling wilderness of London—of taking out your gun, and seeing that it is all well oiled and polished; of trying on your leggings to take the stiffness out of them; of hauling out your old shooting-coat and finding in it a bill telling you at what hour the coach starts for the Moor of Rannoch. Now, this is real delight. I snap my fingers at London. I become a savage—"

Just at this moment the maid tapped at the door and brought in a letter. Surely he knew the handwriting?

"You will excuse me," said he, hurriedly breaking open the envelope, "when I tell you—yes, I thought so—Violet North is, by Jove, in London!"

The Highlands were forgotten in a twinkling.

"Oh, uncle, when is she coming over?" cried Miss Amy, with piteous eyes.

"Already back in London!" cried Mrs. Warrener.

"And where is she living?" cried young Miller.

Mr. Drummond stood out in the middle of the floor, holding the folded letter up in the air.

"Ha-ha, my young people, there are secrets here. Who will bid for them? A thousand mines of Golconda the first offer! No advance on that?—why—"

"Well, he stopped there—and all the merry-making went out of his face—for some one at the door said, quietly,

"May I come in?"

Amy Warrener was the first to answer; and her answer was a quick, sharp cry of delight as she sprung to the door. Then the door was opened; and a tall young lady walked into the room, with wonder and gladness and shyness on her handsome face.

CHAPTER XI.

HOME.

For a second or two she was smothered up in the embraces of the women; then she turned, with a heightened color in her face and a glad look in her eyes, but with a wonderful grace and ease and dignity in her manner, to Mr. Drummond and his guest. Amy Warrener, herself "laughin' maist like to greet," became aware in an instant that, although this was Violet North come back again, she was not quite her own Violet of former days. There was some new and inexplicable quality about her manner—a sort of gracious self-possession that bespoke the development of womanhood.

And yet it was with all a girl's vivacity and eager, impetuous curiosity that she began to pour out questions. She wanted to know all at once what they had been doing, where her school-girl friends were, how Miss Main was getting on; and then she suddenly cried out,

"Oh, you don't know how nice it is to be at home again! and I could not feel at home in England until I came over here."

"And don't you notice any changes?" Drummond asked.

"Oh yes," she said, looking more particularly at him; "I scarcely understand it all yet. It is like a dream as yet—such a change from what I expected."

"Two years make a difference," said he. "We have not kept stationary any more than you have; and you!—why, you have grown a woman."

"Oh, but it was exactly the reverse of that I meant!" she said, anxiously. "You look all so much younger than I expected—except Amy. Why, I used to look on you, Mr. Drummond, as—as rather—"

"As rather an old fellow!" he called out, with a shout of laughter over her embarrassment. "Well, I am old enough, Violet, to warn you not to make people such compliments as these. And so you think we have grown younger?"

"You especially—oh, so much!"

"And I also?" young Miller made bold to ask, though he cast down his eyes.

Now these two had not spoken before. When she came into the room, she glanced at him with some surprise; then from time to time, she let her eyes fall on his face with an expression of a half-shy, half-humorous curiosity. Now she mustered up courage to look him straight in the face; and a trifle of color mounted into her cheeks as she answered, in a somewhat low and embarrassed way,

"I am afraid I scarcely can recollect well enough. You know our—our acquaintance was very short."

So she had not even taken the trouble to remember him!

"I suppose," said he, rather shortly, "you made enough friends out there to pass the time with."

"I forgot none of my friends in England," she said, gently. The reproof was just: he had no right, she plainly intimated, to put himself on a level with these old friends of hers.

By this time the little party had got better shaken together—the first eager curiosity being over—and now Miss Violet began to tell them something of her wonderful adventures and experiences. But the strange thing was that the recital mainly proceeded from the lips of Mr. Drummond. It was by the exercise of a curious, swift, subtle sympathy that he seemed to divine what would be the notions of a girl in this new country; and as she went on, mentioning this circumstance and the other, he took the parable out of her mouth and made himself the interpreter. No one noticed that he did so. It seemed to be Violet North herself talking.

"Precisely," he would say, "I quite see how that half-civilized life must have struck you. Don't you see, you were getting then some notion of how the human race began to fight with nature long before cities were built. You saw them clearing the woods, making roads, building houses, founding small communities. You saw the birth of villages, and the formation of states. You saw the beginnings of civilization, as it were, and the necessity of mutual helpfulness among the settlers, and the general rough-and-ready educations of such a life. Don't you think it must have been a valuable experience to find out how thoroughly new life can be? Here in London, I have no doubt, you got it into your head that the houses and shops must have existed there forever; that the trains to Ludgate Hill and Victoria were a necessary part of the world; that all the elaborate institutions and habits of city life were fixed and unalterable—"

"And then it was so interesting, in these places, to find out what sorts of food they had: I got quite learned in crops—"

"Ah, yes, precisely. There you saw food at its fountain-head, not in blue packets in a grocer's shop. And of course every man would have a pride in his own fields, and ask you what you thought of his crops, and you would come to see something else in a landscape than the mere colors that an English young lady would see. The cattle—did you begin to learn something of the points of the cattle?"

She had to confess her ignorance in that direction.

"Then the wilder and fiercer cattle, Violet: go on and tell us of buffaloes, and grizzlies, and mustangs—I have loved the word mustang ever since I was a boy. Gracious me! how I long for the life of a savage—for prairies, and war-trails, and squaws, and moccasins: Violet, did you ever snare a brace of moccasins when you were meandering about the Rocky Mountains?"

"If I were you," she said, with a sweet sarcasm, "I would say 'moccasíns,' not 'moccásins!"

"Thus it is she crushes with her newly found knowledge. But we are willing to learn. Violet, you shall teach us all about assegais and boomerangs—but those don't belong to America, do they?—and we shall admire the noble savage."

"You were talking of the delights of a savage life—in the Highlands—just before Miss North came in to surprise us," said Mr. Miller.

"Oh," cried Miss North, suddenly, "why didn't you go to the Highlands last year? I thought you had determined to go every year, after your first experience the year before last."

"The truth is—" said Mr. Drummond, with some embarrassment.

Young Miller broke in,—proud to be able to convey information.

"He won't tell you, Miss North. The fact is, he went and gave his holiday-money to a clergyman's widow to take her family down to the sea-side; and if you ask my opinion about it, I think it was much too much of a good thing. I don't see the fun of—"

"Violet, what did you think of New York?" said Drummond, quickly.

The girl laughed: she knew he was not anxious to know her opinion of New York.

"But you are going this year to the Highlands?" she said.

"We hope so."

"I wish I were going with you," the girl said, simply and naturally.

"Why shouldn't you?" said Mr. Miller, boldly.

It was a pretty project that he then and there formed, Miss North would go up to that shooting-box with her friends, and pleasant indeed would be the parties they would have in the evening, when the toils of the day were over. And if a certain young man should happen to be in the neighborhood—by the merest chance, of course—could so hospitable and generous and kindly a fellow as Mr. Drummond was refuse to offer him a few days' shooting? Then there would be odd moments now and again for clambering up hills, in order to sit on the sunlit rocks and listen to the humming of the bees, or for quiet and pensive strolls along the valleys in the cool of the evening with the mountains losing the last fire of the sunset, and a white mist gathering along the bed of the distant loch. Mr. Miller looked anxiously for an answer to this proposal.

"Why shouldn't you?" echoed Mr. Drummond. "We will make you welcome enough."

"You are very kind, indeed," she said, with a smile; "but I am under proper government now. Lady North means to try to put up with me as well as she can; and my sisters almost succeeded this morning in making me believe they liked me. So I am to stay on there; and I suppose, in consequence, we shall move westward some day soon. That will be hard on poor papa; for he will shift his house all for nothing—"

"Why, Violet?"

"Oh," said the young lady, with her ordinary cool frankness, "Lady North and I are sure to have a fight—quite sure. I think her a mean-spirited and tricky little woman; she thinks that I have a frightfully bad temper: so it will be just as it was before."

"There you are quite wrong," said Mr. Drummond, quietly. "It will not be as it was before, but very different. Do you know what people will say of you now, if you and Lady North don't agree? Why, that you have such a bad temper that you can not live in your father's house."

"Perhaps that is true enough," she said, with great modesty; and Amy Warrener saw something in her mischievous smile of the Violet of other days.

"And then," continued her Mentor, "formerly, when you had a quarrel, you could live at Miss Main's school. Where would you go now? Not to school again?"

"Ah, well," she said, with a bright look, "don't let us talk of all those unpleasant things now; for I am so glad to get back and be among you again, that I am disposed to be humble and obedient even to my step-mother. And she is really trying to be very kind to me just now. I am to keep the brougham to-night till eleven o'clock, if you don't turn me out before then. And Lady North is coming over to call on you, Mrs. Warrener; and she wants you all to come to her next 'At Home' on the 30th. I think you have got a card, Mr. Miller?"

"Yes," said he, with some embarrassment. "Do you think your father would object to my going?"

"Oh dear, no," she answered, confidently. "Papa never keeps up old scores; and, as well as I can recollect, you—you—seemed to have pleased him by going to him frankly. How silly we were!" she added, quickly, and with a return of the warm color to her cheeks.

They got away from that subject also, however, and no other reference was made to it. The girl was altogether delighted to be with her old friends again; and the changes she had noticed on her entrance became less prominent now. She submitted, just as she had done in her school-girl days to be alternately lectured, teased, and laughed at by Mr. Drummond; and she did not mind his continually calling her Violet. She made Mrs Warrener promise to bring them all to Lady North's party. She would have Amy come with her for her first drive in the park, where, as her father had consented, she should herself drive Lady North's victoria and pair of ponies.

Mr. Miller got the least share of her attention. These two rarely spoke to each other, and then never without a little embarrassment; but very frequently she had a quiet, curious look at him, apparently trying to discover something. As for him, he simply sat and stared at her—watching her every movement, fascinated by her voice, her smile, the bright, frank look of those darkly lashed eyes. But a great joy was in store for him. For some purpose or other, she took from her pocket a small pencil, but found it was broken.

"Oh, do let me get it mended for you," said he, eagerly. "I know a man who is capital for that."

"Is is worth it?" said she, handing it over.

His reply was to take from his pocket a beautiful little pen and pencil-case, with a knife attached; and this he begged her to accept in exchange, as it was better fitted for a lady than for him.

"In exchange?" she said, with a smile that was to him more than a thousand pencil-cases. "That would be a profitable exchange. This one is gold; mine is aluminium. Thank you, but I could not rob you."

"Well, at all events, you can keep it until I return you this one?"

"Oh yes," she said, "if you will be so kind."

He put that humble little pencil-case—worth about five shillings—in his pocket with as much pride as if it had been made of ivory and diamonds; and he secretly vowed that she should never see it again, even if she lived for a thousand years.

Then, in the old familiar fashion of spending the evening which Violet knew so well, Mary, the maid-servant, came in with the frugal supper; and there was great amusement over her wonder at seeing Miss North.

"How are you, Mary? Are you quite well?" said that young lady, who was a great friend of all the maid-servants and folks in humble capacity.

"Oh yes, miss," stammered Mary; "I mean, ma'am—I am pretty well, thank you."

"Now, there is but one question more I have to ask," said Violet, as they all sat round the small white-covered table, "and I am almost afraid to ask it. Have they built over Grove Park yet?"

"Certainly not," was the answer.

"And the big cedars are still there, and the tall elms, and the rook's nests?"

"Not a thing altered since you left."

"Ah, well! Do you know," she said, "when I used to think of the happiest time I ever spent in England, and the most beautiful place I could remember, I always thought of those Christmas holidays I spent with you, and of our walks at night in the snow. Do you remember how we used to go out quite late at night, with the hard snow crackling beneath one's feet, the gas-lamps shining on the trees, and then go away into the park, through the darkness of those cedars near the gate? Then I used to think of the silence we got into—by the side of the meadows: one seemed to be up quite close to the stars, and you could not imagine there was any body living in those two or three houses. And as for London—though it lay almost under our feet—you know, you could see or hear nothing of it—there was nothing all around but the white snow, and the black trees, and stars. Do you remember all that?"

"But where is it?" said young Miller, looking puzzled. Could she be talking so enthusiastically about some place in Camberwell?

"Over the way," she said, promptly. "Five minutes' walk off."

"And that is the most beautiful place you can remember?" said he. "And you have been to Chamounix?"

"Yes, it is," she said, boldly. "I like Camberwell better than Chamounix, and therefore it is more beautiful. But I was speaking of the snow-time, and the stars, and the quiet of the frosty nights. Perhaps you have never been into Grove Park? If you walk round that way now—"

"I propose we do," said Mr. Drummond, "as soon as we finish supper. I am anxious to discover what it is in the place that makes it the rival of Chamounix.

"Don't you remember?" she said, with great disappointment visible in her face.

"I remember the wonderful starlit nights and the snow, certainly," said he.

"Very well," said she, "weren't they worth remembering? As to Chamounix—well, as to Chamounix—what can one remember of Chamounix? I know what I remember—crowded *tables-d'hote*, hot walks in stifling valleys, firing cannon, and looking through a telescope, and all the ladies trying who could get up the most striking costumes for dinner. To go about a place like that with a lot of people you don't like—"

Here, for some occult reason, Mr. Drummond burst into a most impertinent fit of laughing.

"Oh yes," she said, with her color rising, "I am not ashamed to own it. I liked the people with whom I went walking about Grove Park. If that has any thing to do with it, I am very glad of it, for the sake of the park."

"And they were very fond of you too, Violet," said her old school-fellow, Amy, with unexpected decision. "And you are quite right. And I would—I would hate Chamounix, if I were you."

"Why, child, what do you know about Chamounix?" her mother said.

"I don't want to know anything about it—I hate it."

So that closed the discussion, which had ended in a unanimous decision that Chamounix was a miserable and despicable place as compared with a certain chosen spot in Camberwell.

Now, if Miss North's love and admiration for Grove Park were largely based on the romantic conditions in which she remembered to have seen the place, surely Mr. Miller's impressions were likely to be equally favorable. For when they went outside into the cold night air there was an appearance in the sky overhead that told how the moon was visible somewhere; and they knew that when they got round into the high and open spaces of the park a vast and moonlit landscape would be unrolled before their eyes. Miss Violet and Mrs. Warrener led the way; naturally the discoverer of this wonderful place was pioneer. There was scarcely any one about; the footfalls of the small party were plainly heard in the silence of the grove. Then they reached the gloomy portals of the park—gloomy because of the cedars about—and then they left the region of bright gas-lamps, and passed in and through the darkness of the overhanging trees.

The night was indeed a beautiful one, though as yet they had not seen the moon. The sky overhead was clear, and full of pale stars; in the south a lambent planet was shining. How solemnly stood the great trees, their spreading branches of a jet black against the far off vault of blue, not a rustle of their leaves breaking the deep stillness. There was a scent of hay in the air, one of the meadows adjoining having just been cut.

When at length they had reached the highest portion of the park, and got by one or two tall and silent houses, behold! they came upon a wonderful spectacle. No dramatic surprise could have been more skillfully arranged; for they had become accustomed to the clear and serene darkness of the night, and the twinkling of the pale stars, and the motionless blackness of the lofty trees, and had no further expectation. But all at once they found before them, as they looked away over to Sydenham, a great moonlit space; the air filled with a strange pale glamour that seemed to lie over the broad valley; while the full yellow moon herself hung like a great globe of fire immediately over a long, low line of hill stretching across the southern horizon. These heights, lying under this glory of moonlight, would have seemed dusks, mystic, and remote, but that here and there glittered bright spots of yellow fire, telling of houses hidden among trees, and overlooking the wide plan. It was a wonderful panorama: the burning stars of gold on the shadowy heights, the full yellow moon in the violet-gray sky, the pale light over the plain, and the black trees close at hand, the southward-looking branches of which were touched here and there by the mild radiance. Then the extreme silence of the place—as if that were a pageant all lighted up in an uninhabited world—the cold, sweet night air—the mystery and sadness of the stars.

"Ah, well," said Drummond, with a sigh, "it does not matter whether it is Camberwell or Chamounix; you get very close to heaven on a night like this."

Young Miller felt that in his heart too, for he was standing beside Violet North; and as she was gazing away down into the south, with absent and wistful eyes, he could watch with impunity the beautiful outlines of her face, now touched with a pale and mystic light. He wished to speak to her, and yet he was afraid to break the strange stillness. She did not seem to be aware of his presence; but it was with a secret thrill of pleasure that from time to time his fingers were touched by the corner of the light shawl she wore.

"Is this as fine as what you remember?" he said to her, at length, in a low voice.

She seemed to try to collect herself. She looked at him and said "Yes;" but presently he saw her turn her head away, and he had just caught a glimpse of the great tears that stood in her eyes.

"Young Miller," said Mr. Drummond, as they walked back, "we have beaten down your Chamounix; we have destroyed Mont Blanc; the Glacier des Boissons is no more."

"Quite right," said the young man, humbly; "I give in."

Now, when Violet got back to the house, she found her father's brougham at the door, and she would not enter with them. But she said to Mr. Miller, who happened to be her companion at the moment, "I have some little presents for my friends here; would you kindly take them in for me?"

There was, after all, some school-girl shyness about this young lady; she had not had the courage to offer them the presents herself. And how gladly he undertook the commission! He was proud to have her confidence in this small matter.

Then she bid good-bye to them all. She was a little silent as she left; it was like going away once more from home.

"Then I shall see you on the 30th," said George Miller, looking at her rather timidly.

"Oh yes, I shall be glad to see you," she said, simply; and then she drove away.

He carried the parcels into the house; they were all neatly wrapped up and addressed. He undertook the business of opening them and displaying their contents; and lo! there was on the table a wonderful assortment of gifts, with the fancy of a girl apparent in them. For she had brought strange Indian pipes, decorated with silver and colors and silk, for Mr. Drummond, and a little case containing a couple of revolvers with ivory and silver handles; and there were fans and a marvelous shawl for Mrs. Warrener; and there was an extraordinary necklet of pale coral, with bracelets and what not, for her daughter. James Drummond, gazing with astonishment at this goodly show, pronounced an oration over them.

"There was once upon a time," said he, "a company of poor folk sitting very disconsolate in a room together, and they had grown rather gloomy, and tired of the dullness and grayness of life. And all at once there appeared to them a fairy princess, with a beautiful smile on her face; and she came among them and talked to them, and all the sadness went out of their hearts, and she cheered them so that they began to think that life was quite enjoyable and lovely again. And when she went away, what did they find? Why, she had left behind her, without saying a word about it, all manner of precious and beautiful things, and the poor folk were almost afraid to touch them, in case they should crumble away. But they didn't crumble away at all; for she was a real, live, human fairy; and hadn't she promised to come back, too, and cheer them up a bit now and again? Young Miller, I am sorry she did not expect to see you too."

The young man pulled out the aluminium pencil-case proudly.

"Look at that," said he, "*and that belonged to herself.*"

"Now, James," said Mrs. Warrener, with a kindly smile, "What about her being hardened by all the railway-people?"

"And oh, how pretty she is! and she is more beautiful than ever!" cried Amy, rather incoherently.

Young Miller was silent for a second or two. "I suppose," said he, rather gloomily, "if she stays with her father now, she will be going about a great deal, and seeing lots of people. If she drives in the Park, every one will get to know who she is. How easy it is for girls to have their heads turned by the attention they get!"

"It will take a great deal to turn Violet's head," said Mrs. Warrener, gently. "There is plenty of shrewdness in it."

When Mr. Miller set out to walk over to Sydenham Hill that evening, the notions that went whirling through his brain were alternately disquieting and pleasing. Had he not this treasure of a pencil transferred from her pocket to his? She had breathed upon it many a time; she had held it in her white, small fingers; perchance she may in an absent moment have put it up to her lips. It was a fair, still, moonlight night; he took out the bit of aluminium as if it had been a talisman, and kissed it a hundred times. Then had she not admitted she would be glad to see him on this approaching evening? And already another day was about to begin, to lessen the long procession of dates. It was true that she was very beautiful and very proud; she would have lots of admirers. Lady North was fond of society; Violet would meet all manner of strangers; they would know that her father was a rich man; and they would be eager to win the affections of a girl who had beauty, money, every thing to bestow. The wonderful moonlit landscape was not so lovely now, since she had driven away. The orange points of fire on the heights were almost extinguished. The world generally had grown less fairy-like; but still he was to meet her in less than a fortnight's time.

CHAPTER XII.

WALPURGIS-NIGHT.

On the very next afternoon, Lady North and Violet paid the promised visit to Mrs Warrener. Unluckily, James Drummond was not in the house; but his sister had enough of his shrewdness of perception to see how little likely it was that this step-mother and step-daughter should ever agree—the one a prim, dignified, matter-of-fact little woman, who had a curious watchful and observant look in her cold gray eyes, and a certain affected stateliness of manner; the other, a proud, impetuous girl, who had the bitterest scorn of all pretense, and an amazing frankness in showing it.

Lady North, so far as her formal manner would allow, was profuse in her apologies to Mrs. Warrener for the short notice she had given her; and now it appeared that what Violet had modestly called an "at home" was in reality a fancy-dress ball. Mr. Miller had also been modest in the matter; and had not told his friends of his having received an invitation.

"It is so short a time," said Violet, "but I am sure you will come, Mrs. Warrener—and Amy too—"

"Not Amy, at any rate," said the gentle little house-mother, with a smile. "My only doubt, Lady North, is about my brother. I am afraid a fancy-dress ball would not quite fall in with his habits."

"My dear Mrs. Warrener," said Violet, with the air of a woman of the world, "it does not accord with any body's habits; but it is merely a harmless piece of fun, that even very wise people like. You have no idea how pleased he will be by the show of beautiful costumes. And I know he will come if you say that I particularly asked him. We shall have quite a party by ourselves, you know—Mr. Miller is coming."

"And what would be *his* dress?" asked Mrs. Warrener.

"I don't know," said Violet; and then she added, with a sort of mischievous smile, "Tell him to come as Romeo. Would he not look well as Romeo? Now do, Mrs. Warrener, tell him that I wish him to come as Romeo."

"Very well, Violet," said Mrs. Warrener, with a smile; but she shook her head all the time—the school-girl had not wholly left this young lady.

Now, strange to say, Mr. Drummond accepted the invitation with eagerness and delight—it happened to strike some fancy. In a second he was full of schemes of costume. He would go as this, he would go as that; his sister must be Pharaoh's Daughter, must be Consuelo, must be Lady Jane Gray. In imagination he tumbled all the centuries together; and played hop, skip, and jump through history. In the end he was forced to confess that he did not know what to do.

There came to his aid a practical young man.

"The simplest thing in the world," said George Miller, with a superior air. "You come with me to a man in Bow Street: he will show you colored plates; you can have a dress made for you; or you can see what he has. I will go with you: he will charge you ever so much too much if you let him."

"And you—have you got your dress?" asked Drummond, with a modest air, of this experienced person.

"It is being made," said he, carelessly. "I am going as Charles I."

"I have a message for you as regards that," said Mrs. Warrener, looking at him in her quiet and humorous way. "Violet was over here yesterday. She bid me tell you you must go to the ball as Romeo."

All the carelessness went out of the young man's manner in a second.

"No!" said he. "Did she, really? It is not a joke?"

"I have delivered the message as I got it."

"By Jove! Then I must telegraph to them to stop the Charles I. dress—oh, I don't care whether I have to pay for it or not!—in any case, I will go as Romeo." And then he added, quickly, with a flush in his face, "Don't you think the joke a good one? She was making fun, of course; but what a joke it will be to surprise her?"

Forthwith it was arranged that these three should make up a little party to go to Bow Street; and on their way thither it almost seemed as if Mr. Drummond had gone out of his senses. Young Miller did not understand this kind of thing. Imaginary conversation between discarded costumes about the character of their successive wearers! Ghosts getting into a *costumier's* repository, and having a fancy-dress ball by phosphorescent light! He treated such nonsense with impatience; he would rather have understood clearly what dress Mr. Drummond proposed to wear.

Then, even in the presence of the grave and puzzled *costumier*, also! Young Miller, as a shrewd and practical person, perceived that this was a matter of business, and not a subject for all manner of whimsical absurdities. Where was the fun of bewildering a *costumier*, when that worthy person was patiently turning over the colored plates?

"Mercutio," said Drummond. "Is that Mercutio? How plump and well-favored he is! I always loved Mercutio—but I did not know he was so good-looking. They say Shakspeare killed him because he could not keep up the supply of jokes that Mercutio needed. They might as well say that God took and plunged the rivers into the sea lest there shouldn't be enough water left on land for a long river-course. That's why the rivers always take the nearest way; and that's why poor old Mercutio was killed."

Now what was the good of talking like that to this puzzled tradesman and artist? Young Miller had continually to keep saying.

"And how much would that be—in blue satin and velvet, for example?"

It was indeed very lucky for these two that Mr. Miller had gone with them; for, in the end, when they had finally made their choice, he suggested an arrangement which lessened the proposed cost by more than one-half. The costumes were to be made according to sketches which Mr. Drummond was to supply; but they were to remain the property of the *costumier;* and only their temporary use to be charged for. Not only Mr. Drummond, but also his sister, who had more to do with accounts, was quite impressed by the business-like way in which Mr. Miller drew up and ratified this contract.

One evening that little garden in Camberwell saw a strange sight. It was nearly dusk; under the cherry and apple trees there was almost darkness. And what was this tall and silent figure, clad from head to heel in a cloak of sombre red, with a sword thrusting out the cloak behind, with a peaked black cap coming down on the forehead, and that surmounted by a tall red feather that here and there brushed the leaves of the trees? What manner of man was this, with ruddy shadows under the strangely vivid eyes, with cadaverous cheeks, with pointed beard and curled mustache, and with a fiendish grin on his lips? Then a younger man stepped down from the balcony; and, behold, the youth was bravely clad in blue and silver, with a cape of velvet hanging from his shoulders; and there was a soft yellow down on his upper lip; and a look of gay laughter about his handsome face. He, in turn, was followed by a beautiful and gentle creature, who wore her yellow hair in two long plaits behind, and who appeared in a simple dress of white, with its tight sleeves and its sachel touched here and there with blue. Strangely enough, as the three figures walked here and there through the twilight of the garden, Mephistopheles, Romeo, and Margaret spoke the same language, and laughed with the same light laughter. It was their dress rehearsal: the solitary spectator being a young lady in the balcony, who said they looked like ghosts, and hoped she should not dream of them that night.

The important evening at length arrived; and Mr. Miller had arranged to dress at James Drummond's house, for he was quite sure that, without his supervision, Mephistopheles would be found lacking in fiendish eyebrows and mustache. James Drummond was not accustomed to these things; he was a mere child in the hands of young Miller, who dealt with this matter in a serious and didactic fashion.

The big house in Euston Square was all lighted up; Chinese lanterns were hung along the covered way leading down to the gate; and on the pavement a large number of people had assembled to watch the arrivals descend from the carriages and walk up the lane of dimly colored light. There was a murmur of surprise when a tall, gaunt figue in sombre red stalked by, with a whisper of "The Devil!" Romeo was a little bewildered; he was wondering how Violet would be dressed; whether she would be kind or proud; whether she would dance with many people. He resolved that he would not stay in the room if she danced with any other than himself; and he already hated that unknown stranger.

More brilliant lights; a sound of distant music; some servants, with staring eyes and anxious manner.

Mr. Drummond taps young Romeo on the shoulder. "You are in the way."

He stands aside, and two strange creatures go by.

"Thank you," says one of them, courteously. "You have allowed two centuries to pass."

As yet they are but encountering the outward ripples of the great whirlpool within. Cleopatra, proud and dusky, with golden ornaments pendant over her forehead, comes out into the cooler air of the hall; she is attended by an executioner, draped in black, and masked. Whose are these enormous scarlet feathers sweeping back from the cowl? Surely they and the long slashed cloak belong to a high baron of Germany! There, at the foot of the stairs, Mary Queen of Scots is chatting pleasantly with a tall youth dressed as *chef de cuisine;* beside them stands the redoutable Jean Sansterre, the lights gleaming on his suit of chain-mail, his huge shield and battle-axe. Harlequin whips by; the solemn Master of Ravenswood appears with Ophelia on his arm; the mighty-hearted Barbarossa and the Fille du Regiment, laughing and talking together, are making for the ball-room.

"'Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?'"

At the sound of that well-known voice our three strangers turned instantaneously. What wonderful vision was this?—

not the Violet North they knew, but Juliet herself descended in all her beauty from the moonlit balcony—her face a trifle pale, perhaps, but that may have been the reflected light of her robes of white satin—her magnificent black hair looking blacker because of this gleaming dress—her dark eyes full of fire, and light, and gladness—the proud, sweet mouth partly opened in the excitement of the moment, and just showing a glimmer of milk-white teeth. Young Romeo was altogether overwhelmed, blinded, bewildered. What great condescension was this—or was she but toying with him : she, the full-grown woman still fancying that he was but a youth ? There was more of the girl than of the woman, however, in the delight of her face, in the eager fashion in which she insisted on showing them where Lady North was posted.

"Oh, Violet, how lovely you look in that dress!" Mrs. Warrener could not help saying, in an under-tone.

"Can we get up stairs ?" the girl said. "Lady North is on the landing. Mr. Drummond, shall we lead the way ?"

Surely Romeo and Juliet should have gone together. Romeo was rather silent when he saw that beautiful creature in the white satin and pearls pass on with the tall figure in sombre-red.

For a few seconds the crush on the stairs kept them jammed in and motionless at one point of the ascent. Violet turned round; Romeo was just beneath; and she said to him, with a tender sweetness,

"'How cam'st thou hither, tell me! and wherefore?
The orchard walls are high, and hard to climb;
And the place death, considering who thou art,
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.'"

He could not answer—his face flushed red with embarrassment; but fortunately another upward movement on the part of the crowd carried them on again and hid his vexation.

"She has studied her part better than you have," said Mrs. Warrener, with a quiet smile.

"How could I know?" said he, almost angrily. "I did not know she would be Juliet. I suppose these are the speeches Juliet makes. And one looks such a fool."

"But surely you know the pretty things that Romeo says to her?" said his companion.

"No, I don't," he said, gloomily. "Poetry was never much in my way. But—but if you know, Mrs. Warrener—couldn't you give me a hint or two—"

"I think my brother has taken up your part," said she; and then, indeed, they heard that Mephistopheles and Juliet were addressing each other in very beautiful language. George Miller leaped to the conclusion that there was a great deal of exaggerated and tawdry sentiment about Shakspeare; and that, in any case, theatrical stuff should be kept for theatres.

On the landing, and in a recess so that her guests could pass by her into the ball-room, they found Lady North, who was very dignified and very courteous. Her eldest daughter, Anatolia, stood by her. What made young Mr. Miller ask this rather plain young lady, so that his companions could distinctly overhear, for the next waltz she had free? He had not asked Violet to dance.

They looked in on the wonderful assemblage of picturesque figures—certain groups of them here and there in motion—the sound of music all through the place—the brilliant colors and diverse forms almost bewildering the eye. The fair Juliet, her hand still on the arm of the tall and sombre Mephistopheles, showed him a certain little pink card.

"I have not given away one dance yet," said she.

"Do you wish me to ask you to dance?" he replied.

"Yes."

"It is Romeo who ought to dance with Juliet."

"I wish to dance with you—or, what is the same thing, I want you to engage me for one or two, that we may keep together, and see the people."

"Give me your programme, Violet."

He took it and managed, with some difficulty, to put certain hieroglyphics on it.

"Why, you have put J. D. at every one!" cried Juliet.

"Yes," said he, "that is what I should prefer. But I am not greedy. Whenever you wish to cheer up the drooping spirits of your Romeo, I will set you free. What have you said to him, Violet?"

She turned round and regarded the young man with some wonder. He was certainly not looking well pleased.

"Come," she said, "I will take you all round by another way to the balcony, and you will see every thing from there. That will be better than fighting across the room. But perhaps you wish to dance, Mr. Miller?"

"No, thank you," said he, gruffly.

She would take no notice of his manner. She said, gently,

"If you will follow us, then, we can go round to the balcony, and have a nice cool place almost to ourselves. Shall we go, Mr. Drummond?"

"I am no pilot," said he, in a tragic voice.

"'Yet wert thou as far
As that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea,
I would adventure for such merchandise!'"

"''Tis but thy name that is mine enemy!'" she retorted, with a light laugh, as she again took his arm and led him away.

"'Thou art thyself, though Mephistopheles.
What's Mephistophles? It is not hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. Oh, be some other name!'"

"We appear to have got behind the scenes of a theatre," said young Mr. Miller, with savage contempt, to his companion.

"Don't you think it is very amusing," said Mrs. Warrener, in her quiet way, "to see the girl play Juliet so well? How delightfully gracious her manner is!"

"I think when you are on the stage, you ought to be on the stage," said he, bluntly; "and when you're in a private house, you ought to be in a private house. I don't see the fun of all that tomfoolery."

"Do you mean the fancy costumes?" Mrs. Warrener asked, with gentle sarcasm.

"Oh dear, no—I mean that poetry and nonsense."

Certainly the small room through which they were now passing was, in one respect, like the gloomy corridors "behind the scenes." It was dark enough, but they could, at all events, see that in the centre of the room a table was placed which had a white cloth on it.

"Isn't Lady North kind?" said Violet. "She has given me this room for us four, so that as soon as the others go down to supper we can have ours in here, in quiet and coolness."

"'By whose direction found'st thou out this place?'" asked her companion.

"Please, Mephistopheles-Romeo, to keep to your own speeches," she observed, with some dignity. "That one belongs to me."

From this small room they went out on the balcony, which was hung round with pink and white, and lighted up with Chinese lanterns; and, passing along, they came once more in sight of the brilliant ball-room, at the open windows of which they now stood. Two or three others had discovered this quiet retreat—opportune for conversation as well as agreeable on account of its coolness; but somehow these dusky figures loved the darkness rather than the light, and Violet's party, assembled in front of one of the windows, was left pretty much to itself.

She set to work to exorcise the demon—was it some ridiculous jealousy?—that had got possession of this young man. She had not much trouble. Who could have withstood the bright, frank smile, and the friendly look of her beautiful dark eyes? Besides, was he not in Juliet's own balcony—not looking up to her, but actually with her—while there was no petulant nurse to call her?

"Don't you mean to dance at all to-night?" said she.

"No."

"Not even with me?"

"Your card is full," said he, shortly.

"That is but a joke," she said. "I asked Mr. Drummond to make sure I should have plenty of time to spend with my especial friends, and he took the whole night; and I am not sorry. I fancy, Mr. Drummond, you think that dancing would not accord with the dignity of Mephistopheles, don't you?"

"Nor yet with his age," said he. "Dancing is for young Romeos. Young Romeo, why are you lounging idly here?"

The younger man was looking rather wistfully at Violet. He was beginning to be sorry for his sulkiness. Would she forgive him? Was her kindness real? Or was she only making fun?

"Will you dance this waltz with me?" said he, in desperation; and she assented at once.

They passed into the ball-room.

"I thought you were to dance with Anatolia?" she said, with a smile.

"She had to stay by Lady North," he answered. "I—I am very glad."

"You ought not to say such things: she is my sister. And why did you ask her?"

"I don't know," said he; and presently they were lost in the whirling crowd.

James Drummond and his sister had watched them enter the room. They were a sufficiently handsome couple, these two young people, as they stood there for a moment together—the slim, square-shouldered young fellow in blue velvet and silver, with his fine features all lighted up now by a new gratitude and pleasure, and the tall, shapely, proud-featured girl, whose hair seemed blacker than the raven's wing in contrast with the gleaming white of her dress. After that they were visible but from time to time in the whirl of wonderful shapes and colors that moved to the light, rapid, and harmonious music.

"That is the beautiful time of life," Drummond said to his sister, as they watched these two go by. "Youth, health, bright spirits, the joy of living life instead of merely looking at it—and yet there is some sadness about the spectacle. Not to them, of course; only to the looker-on. They are not thinking of to-morrow, nor yet of middle age, nor of any doubt or disquiet. Look at them—don't you wish you could make this moment eternity for them, and prolong that delight of rapid motion for ever and ever?"

"I do not," his sister said, promptly. "I don't know what you mean, James; but you are always coupling these two together, as if they must necessarily marry."

"Why not?" said he, rather absently.

"You know very well: the notion of a proud, high-spirited girl like Violet marrying a young man like that—who has got no more imagination, or feeling, or mind than a block of wood!"

"You are never fair to young Miller, Sarah. He is quite as intelligent as most young men; and he is far more willing to improve himself than any I know."

"He sha'n't marry Violet."

"You used to like him well enough."

"Yes; because I never dreamed that any thing serious would come of that foolish adventure of theirs. But now I am sure he means to marry her if she will let him; and I think she has a sort of tender, half-romantic interest in him at which she laughs, but which is likely to make mischief."

"That is how you describe marriage?" said he.

But at this moment the two young people came back—flushed, eager, gay in spirits; Romeo in especial being delighted, and showing his delight by being anxious to share it. Mrs. Warrener must really go in and dance. The flashing-by of the different characters was wonderful. Had she seen Henry VIII. go down? What was this perfume they were burning?

Then he was anxious that Violet should give him the next dance, and the next dance, and the next again. But she refused. She was not going to desert her friends. When this present dance was over, she invited Mephistopheles to walk with her through the room that they might look at the crowd together; and Romeo and Margaret followed, the former quite glad and contented now. It is true that he had more rivals than ever. Violet North was known to but few of her step-mother's guests; but the appearance of the girl was too striking to escape unnoticed; and there were all sorts of applications to Lady North for an introduction to the beautiful young lady dressed as Juliet. That young lady was exceedingly courteous to these successive strangers; but how could she promise them a dance, seeing that her card was full to the very last line?

So the night went by, in music, laughter, and gladness; and they had supper all by themselves in that little room, the fair Juliet being queen of the feast; and Lady North sat with them for a time, and said some pretty things about Margaret's dress; and Violet's father looked in on them, and said to young Miller, "Well, sir, been running away with any more school-girls lately?" As for the young lady herself, the light on her face was something to look at; it seemed to one sitting there there that youth had nothing more beautiful to give than such a night.

"What do you think of it all?" she said to Mr. Drummond, when they went back into the ball-room, to look on at a slow and stately minuet that was being danced by a few experts. "Don't you think it is lovely?"

"I am trying to think what you think of it," said he. "To me the chief delight of it is the delight I see in your face. I have never seen a girl at her first ball before; it is a good thing to see."

"Why do you speak so sadly?"

"Do I?"

"Yes. And when I am not by, I see you looking at the whole affair as if it were fifty miles away. I wish you would dance with me, instead of merely standing and looking on like that."

"It is for young Romeos to dance:" that was all he would say—and he said it very kindly to her; and indeed at this moment young Romeo did come up and claim the next dance, so that she went away with him.

A little time after, when the loud music ceased, and there was nothing heard but a newly awakened hum of conversation and the shuffling of feet, young Romeo said to his partner.

"Shall we go through that little supper-room and surprise them in the balcony?"

"If you like," she said: she was ready for any thing.

They got out and round to that small room; the candles were still burning brightly on the table. She was leading the way, for there was room but for one to pass, when he put his hand on her hand to detain her. She looked round in some surprise.

"Just a second," said he, and she could not understand why his eyes should look so anxious. "I want to speak to you, Violet—I have something to say to you—"

Then she understood him in a moment; and she drew back afraid. Her first impulse was the school-girl one to beat a sudden retreat into the balcony: her second, the woman's one, to implore him to spare them both the unnecessary pain of a request and refusal. But she had miscalculated his intentions.

"Only this," said he, in nervous haste, "will you promise me not to marry any body for two years to come?"

It was a strange request; a declaration of jealousy rather than of love. The girl was rather pale, and she was certainly frightened: had she had more self-possession, she would have laughed.

"I don't quite know what you mean," she said. "I am not likely to marry any one—I don't think of marrying any one—"

"All I want is a chance," he said; and he put both his hands over that one that he still held, while he looked in her face. "You will let me hope that some day I may persuade you to be my wife—"

"I can not promise—I can not promise," she said, almost wildly.

"I don't ask you," he said. "Violet, now don't be hard."

She looked at him—at the entreaty in his eyes.

"What do you want me to say?" she asked, in a low voice.

"That you will give me leave to hope that some day you will marry me."

"It is only a 'perhaps?'" she said, with her eyes turned to the floor.

"It is only a 'perhaps'—that is all," he said, eagerly.

"Very well, then."

In his transport he would fain have kissed her, but he was afraid; he kissed her hand passionately, and said she was an angel of kindness.

"And then," said he, "Violet, you know I must ask your father's permission—"

"Oh no, no!" she cried instinctively, feeling that that would pledge her more and more.

"But only as between him and me," the young man said, with the same impetuous haste. "You have nothing to do with it. You are not bound by that. But of course he sees already why I have become so intimate with the rest of the family; and this would only be putting every thing straight and above-board—"

"Oh, very well," said she, rather quickly. "There must be no stupid secret this time. And you will tell my father that I have not promised to marry you—that it is only—"

"I will tell him every thing. Violet, how kind you are!"

"Come away," she said, hurridly, and her face was pale. "You must dance with Mrs. Warrener."

What had suddenly raised the spirits of this young man to the verge of madness? He seemed drunk with delight; his face afire with pleasure; his laughter extravagant; his speech rapid and excited. Violet, on the other hand, was pale, concerned, and silent. When George Miller took Mrs. Warrener away into the room, Violet, left alone with Mr. Drummond, said little, but that little was said with an unusual earnestness of kindness. He would have been surprised by it, but that he knew how anxiously kind she always was to her old friends.

He drew her attention to a strange blue light that began to be visible even though the ruddy awning of the balcony. It was time they were getting home.

"And I am so glad that you have been amused. I should have been miserable if you had taken all this trouble and been disappointed."

"Do not fear that," said he, with a smile. "To look at you enjoying yourself would have been enough pleasure for any one."

It was, indeed, the cold gray of the morning when these strange figures issued out of the ruddy hall and made their way home in the new and pale light. Of what were they all thinking, now that another day had come, and the hurry and excitement of that Walpurgis-night over and gone forever?

One young man, in a four-wheeled cab, making for Piccadilly, was communing with himself thus:

"How handsome she will look at a dinner-table! In her case, anyway, a man might fairly be proud of taking his own wife out for a drive. I wonder what my father will do for me—surely something handsome; and then, if her father gives her any thing at all decent, we shall get on very well. By Jove, what a precious lucky fellow I am! And she sha'n't have to fear any neglect or unkindness from me: I see too much of that going on."

In another vehicle, going in another direction, a tall, thin, middle-aged man, looking rather sad, worn, and tired, was talking to his sister. But surely not of the fancy-dress ball?

"I suppose," he was saying, in his absent and dreamy way, "that Roland, the brave knight Roland, never existed. I don't much care about that; for the man who imagined such a perfect type of manhood—who, among all the trivialities and commonplace of the life around him—the breakfasts, dinners, and suppers, the rising in the morning to wash your face—the wretched details of one hour after another—well, I think the man who managed in the midst of all that to imagine such a splendid figure as Roland was far greater than the Roland he created. Don't you think so, Sarah? I don't care whether King Arthur ever lived; because a greater than Arthur lives now, and tells us about him. And yet I think that Tristram is the bravest knight, and has the most picturesque story, in the 'Morte d'Arthur.'"

And again—but surely this had nothing to do with the fancy-dress ball?—

"I wonder if the wise men of Egypt wished to teach the people a lesson in humility when they made the beetle an object of worship? Or was it a challenge to faith? Fancy what an imposture the owl was as a symbol of Minerva—the biggest fool of a bird you can find. I suppose owls don't eat grapes; but no bird but a half-blind owl could have been such a fool as to peck at Zeuxis's painted grapes."

And again—but what on earth had this to do with the fancy-dress ball?—

"What a fine thing it must have been to carry about with you a sword—the sort of consciousness, I mean, of having the power of life or death with you. If you were weak, the sword became part of yourself, and gave you strength. Now they go to war with engines and machines! and I suppose you seldom know you have killed a man. But don't you think that a great war must leave behind it, in thousands of human bosoms, a secret consciousness of having committed murder?—a suspicion, or a certainty, that a man must not even mention to his wife?—the half glimmer of a dying face, the horrid recollection of a vague splash of blood?"

In the house which these three people had just left, a young girl sat alone in her own room, her face bent down, her hands clasped on her knees.

"Have I promised? have I promised?" This was what she was thinking. "How anxious and pitiful he looked! And that is the time that comes but once to a girl to be kind or to be cruel to her first lover. I could not be cruel; and yet I am not deeply pledged. We may find out it is all a mistake, after all; and when we are old, I dare say we shall laugh over our youthful romance. When will he speak to my father?"

Her thoughts took another turn—fled southward with the speed of lightning:

"Oh, my good, kind friend!" she would have said, if she had translated her fancies into speech, "why were you so sad to-night, and silent, and far-away in your look? You said you were pleased—only to please me. Have you no one to ask you what you are thinking about, when you look like that? And don't you know there are some who would give their life—who would willingly and gladly give their own worthless life away—if that would brighten your sad eyes and make you cheerful and happy?"

CHAPTER XIII.

FIRE AND WATER.

If George Miller had any hope of winning Violet North for a wife, he set about the task in the most wrong-headed of fashions. A little more imagination, and of the perception that accompanies imagination, would have shown him the folly of prematurely brandishing in the face of a high-spirited girl, who dearly loved her liberty, those shackles of matrimony which ought to have been kept in the background, or altogether concealed. He would have seen that his best chances hung on his fostering that sentiment of half-humorous, half-tender romance with which she was disposed to regard her youthful lover; he ought to have let the gentle process of time strengthen this sentiment; he ought to have accustomed her to the notion of losing her liberty by slow and insidious degrees. The matter-of-fact young man missed all that. He wanted to know exactly how they stood. He could not understand why they should not be engaged like other people. What harm was there in a ring? In a word, he was anxious to take possession of a beautiful wife; while she regarded his claims upon her with surprise and distinct aversion—hence all manner of lovers' quarrels, which were exciting enough, but rather dangerous.

First of all, he had gone to Sir Acton North, who received him with much friendliness.

"What!" said he, when the young man had told his story, "you run away with a girl, and then you come and ask her father for permission to court her. That is putting the horse behind the cart, isn't it?"

Mr. Miller was very nervous; but when his proposed father-in-law was good enough to make a joke, he was bound to laugh at it; so he grinned a ghastly grin.

"What does she say, eh? What does she say herself? That is the point."

Indeed, the great railway engineer could have no objection to the young man as a husband for Violet. He was of a rich and reputable family; he was young, good-looking, apparently good-tempered; his business prospects were excellent. There was another point to be considered. Sir Acton had a suspicion that the truce between his wife and her step-daughter was dangerously hollow; at any moment the girl might have to go; and whither could she go? If she wanted to marry this young man, why should she not? Moreover, he knew he would be paying a compliment to Lady North in rather encouraging the attentions of this young man; so that, while he pleased himself by rendering Violet's future more secure, he would make his consent a favor granted to his wife. This is always good policy on the part of a husband.

"Well, sir," young Miller answered, "I have asked nothing definite. I thought it better to come to you first."

"Quite right, quite right. Well, you must question herself, you know; but be cautious."

Mr. Miller was rather puzzled by the twinkling light that came into the gray eyes of this big, white-bearded man.

"She wants dealing with," said her father, frankly. "She won't be mastered. However, she has been very quiet and good since we came back from Canada—perhaps that will last."

These cautions were rather ominous; but, then, a young man is always convinced that he knows a dozen times as much about the nature of his sweetheart as her own father or mother knows, who has only lived with her for a matter of twenty years or so.

"There is another point," said George Miller, pulling his courage together, and proceeding to talk with a business-like air. "Of course I don't know what she will say; but it may be better if I tell you how my money matters stand. I hope shortly to have about nine hundred pounds a year from this partnership. Then, when I marry, I expect my father will give me twenty thousand pounds. I don't see how he could give me less than that, because he gave as much to my sister when she married, and I am the only son."

"When you get it, don't put it in railways," said Sir Acton, briefly.

"Oh dear, no," said young Miller (though he would have liked half an hour's chat on this matter with so competent an authority). "If I can't get two or three good mortgages—and I suppose it is difficult to get them nowadays at six per cent.—I mean to spread the money over half a dozen of the best foreign stocks; and that way you can average nearly six per cent, without very much risk."

"Very good—very good," said Sir Acton; "but keep it nearer five. Five is quite enough; there is never any great safety over five."

"And then," said the young man, rather hesitatingly, "I suppose I shall have about two thousand pounds a year."

"Very good; quite enough to live on," was Sir Acton's business-like reply. "Too much, I should say, for young people. You ought to save on that."

Mr. Miller waited for a second; he seemed to expect that Sir Acton would say something more. Was there to be no mention—not even the least hint—of the possible dowry on the other side?

A servant came to say the carriage was below.

"You will excuse me, I am sure," said Sir Acton, shaking hands with the young man. "You will go into the drawing-room, I suppose: the girls are sure to be there."

"Sir Acton," the young man said, stopping him, "I haven't said how much I am grateful to you for—for—"

"No, no, not at all," said the other, as he hurried away. "You settle it all with her."

Mr. Miller crossed the passage, and entered the drawing-room; the music ceased as he did so, and one of Lady North's daughters left the piano. Altogether there were four girls in the room; one of them being Violet, who, knowing that Mr. Miller was in the house, and guessing the object of his visit, had taken refuge with her half-sisters, so that he should not find her alone.

It was a large and sombre apartment; for Lady North and her daughters affected high art in the matter of house-decoration. What with the dark painting of the ceiling, the bottle-green paper and brown panelings of the walls, the deep unrelieved red of the carpet; the black cabinets, and the stained windows, the spacious and melancholy chamber looked like a great sepulchral vault. It used to be said—but the statement was not true—that Lady North's daughters, when they happened to be at home in the evening, sat in a row in this solemn apartment, all of them silent, all of them dressed in white, each holding a tall white lily in her hand, and having a silver star in her hair. At the present moment, at all events, they were not so engaged. They seemed singularly disturbed, restless, and embarrassed when Mr. Miller entered—all except Violet, who, to tell the truth, looked a little impatient and angry. First of all, the young lady who had been playing said she wished to find some music somewhere, and left the room. After a second or two, another came to the conclusion that Sally would never find the music; and so she set off to look for it. The color in Miss Violet's face deepened. Then the third and remaining sister sprung up, and said,

"Isn't that the postman, Violet? Oh, I must go and see what he has brought."

This was too much.

"You know it is not the postman!" she said, hotly. "I wish, Anatolia, you would stay where you are."

"I shall be back directly," said Anatolia; and then she went quickly, leaving these two in solemn silence, both embarrassed, and one inclined to be vexed, angry, and rebellious.

"Why should you wish them to stay in the room, Violet?" he asked.

"Because I don't like to be made a fool of. They know quite well why you are here to-day. And they believe—they believe—I can not tell you what nonsense they believe!"

"I know," said he. "The girls are sensible. They believe we are engaged, or about to be. Why shouldn't we be engaged?"

"Because I do not choose to be engaged."

"Every body approves of it," said he. "Your father has no objections; I am sure Lady North would have none; and I can answer for my people that they would be delighted. And that is another thing, Violet—I should so like to introduce you to my family."

"You are very kind," she said, "but I don't see why I should be introduced to them any more than to other families whom I don't know."

"Well, that is rather strange," said he, "considering our relations."

"I was not aware of any relations existing between us."

"Oh, indeed."

"No."

"I think you are in rather a bad temper to-day."

"I don't wish to offend you," she said; "but it is better to tell you the plain truth. When you talk about an engagement, and about being introduced to your friends, you make me wish I had never seen you; you do, indeed. Look at those girls going away—because they think we have secrets to talk over."

In her impatience, she got up and went to the piano.

"What would you like me to play for you?" she said, coldly.

He was quite as much inclined to be angry at this moment as she was; but he was afraid of the consequences. She was in a mood that might work mischief if she were provoked.

"Violet," he said, "do be reasonable. You are too proud. You dislike the notion of people imagining that you—well, that you care enough for me, or for any man, to think of marrying him. But every girl has to go through that; and if the truth were known, other girls don't laugh at her—they envy her. I do not wish to force you to do any thing you don't like; only I must say I expected a little better treatment when I came here to-day."

"I don't wish to treat you badly, or goodly, or any way," she said, with indignant incoherence. "Why can't we be friends like other people? I wish to be kind to you—I do, indeed. All the time I was in Canada there was nobody in England I thought more about than you—at least, there was next to nobody. And when I saw you over at Mr. Drummond's I thought it would be such a nice thing to be friends with you. And now you want to drag me into engagements and interviews—"

"Well, you are a stupid girl," he said, with a sudden burst of good humor. "Don't you know that you are so pretty that I am bound to try to secure you for my wife? You might go and marry somebody else while that nice friendship was the only bond between us. Come, Violet—"

He took her hand; she drew it away.

"What shall I play for you?" said she.

He suddenly regarded her with a suspicious look.

"Perhaps," said he, with equal coldness, "you have reasons for not wishing that we should be engaged?"

"Plenty," she said, frankly.

"Perhaps there is some one else to whom you would rather be engaged?"

A mischievous notion got into her head at this moment: she answered nothing.

"Am I right?" he said, with an affectation of lofty calmness.

"What if you are?" she said, looking down.

His calmness went.

"Then I consider," he said, warmly, "that, if that is so, you have been treating me shamefully—letting me come here on a fool's errand; but I don't believe it—I tell you I don't believe—"

"You don't believe what?"

"That you are likely to be engaged to some one else."

"I never said any thing of the kind," she said, with provoking sweetness. "I thought I had been telling you how I abhorred the notion of being engaged to any body. If you choose to imagine a lot of foolish things, I can not help it. I wished to be very friendly with you. I don't see why you should get into a temper. You have not told me what you wish me to play."

"Thank you," he said, "I think I must go now."

She rose, with great gentleness and dignity, and offered him her hand.

"I am sorry you are going so soon," she said.

He stood looking at her with irresolution, regret, anger, and disappointment, all visible at once in his face—disappointment most marked, perhaps.

"Some men," said he, calmly, "would call your conduct by an ugly name; they would say it was the conduct of—a flirt."

The word seemed to sting her like a horsewhip.

"I never flirted with any one in all my life," she said, hotly. "No one would dare to say such a thing to me."

"Why not?" he said, forgetting all his calmness, and becoming as vehement as herself. "You allow a man to ask you to marry him—"

"How could I prevent that?"

"You allow him to go to your father, and make arrangements, and have every thing understood; and then you turn round on him, and say there is nothing understood, and hint that you would rather be engaged to some body else, and all that—and that is not the conduct of a flirt? I wonder what is!"

"Then," said she, with flashing eyes, "if that is your opinion of me, you had better go."

"Yes, I will go," said he; and he crossed the room, took up his hat, bowed to her, and went out.

She sat down, with flaming cheeks, to the piano, and tried to play. That was not much use. She rose, and, hastily going to her own room, flung herself on the bed, and burst into a flood of passionate and angry tears, vowing to herself a thousand times that she would never again have any thing to say to any man of woman born, not if she were to live a thousand years.

CHAPTER XIV.

"LIKE GETTING HOME AGAIN."

THE cup of her sorrows was not yet full. When she had quite exhausted her indignation over the perfidy and unreasonableness and bad temper of mankind, and when she had quite resolved that she would never marry—no, not if a king's son were to entreat her—she got up, and washed her face, and arranged her hair, and went to Lady North. In a humble and submissive tone she asked the little, dignified, gray-eyed woman to let her have the brougham for that evening.

Lady North was surprised and offended. Her daughter Anatolia had run quickly to tell her that now there was no longer any doubt about Violet being engaged; for Mr. Miller was in the study in confidential talk with Sir Acton; while Violet, silent and embarrassed, sat in the drawing-room, and would answer no questions about the young man. When, therefore, Violet now presented herself before her step-mother, that lady naturally concluded she had come to inform her of the engagement. In place of that, she only asked for the brougham.

"Violet," said Lady North, coldly, "I do *not* think that this excessive secrecy becomes a young girl."

"I don't know what you mean," the girl said, with a sudden flash of indignation in her eyes. "What secrecy?"

"I do not wish to enquire, if you do not wish to confide in me," said the other, in her slow, precise fashion. "I should have thought I was the proper person to whom you ought to have come for advice. I have no doubt you want the brougham to go over to your friends in Camberwell."

"I am very glad to have friends in Camberwell," said the girl, proudly. "It is something to have true friends anywhere. But what is the secrecy? What have I concealed?"

"You appear not to know," said Lady North, fixing her cold, keen, gray eyes on the girl, "that I was aware of Mr. Miller being with your papa?"

"And what is that to me?" Violet said, rapidly, and with hot cheeks. "Why should I come and report to you what does not concern me? If you were anxious to know what my father and Mr. Miller were talking about, why not ask themselves? There is something quite as bad as secrecy and concealment—and that is suspicion—constant suspicion, watching you at every turn, when you have nothing at all to conceal—"

She suddenly altered her tone; drawing herself up, and speaking with a certain proud indifference,

"I suppose you don't wish me to have the brougham?"

"Your papa won't be home until late this evening. Really, the responsibility—"

"All right," said the girl, turning toward the door, "a four wheeled cab will do as well."

"Ah! Violet," said her step-mother, with a sigh, "no one seems to have the least control over you."

"No; because no one ever cared to have," said the girl, bitterly, as she left the room—"never since I was born."

When she got outside the house, she seemed to breathe a freer and fresher air. Adventuring out by herself in this fashion did not seem to concern her much. She had no difficulty in getting a four-wheeled cab; and she bid the man, before crossing Waterloo Bridge, stop for a few minutes in the Strand.

She went into one shop, and bought a huge flagon of lavender-water, or some such scent: that was for Mrs. Warrener. She went into another shop, and bought a beautiful little kerchief: that was for Amy. Then she went into a bookseller's shop.

"I want you to give me a book on philosophy, if you please," said the handsome young lady, in her gentlest way.

"Certainly," said the book-seller; and then he waited further instructions.

"Oh, but I don't know what," she said, observing this. "You must tell me. It is for a gentleman who has studied nearly every thing; and it must be a very good one. What is the best one you have got?"

"Really I don't know," said the book-seller, with a smile. "Here is John Stuart Mill's—"

"Oh, he won't do at all," said Violet promptly; "he is alive."

The book-seller began to be interested and amused.

"I beg your pardon," said he respectfully, "but you do not mean that your friend is wiser than any body alive?"

"I did not quite say that," she answered, simply. "However, you must give me something he is not likely to have read—something very difficult, and first-class, and good."

Now, if this customer had been a fussy old gentleman in spectacles, or a wrinkled old lady in black satin, the bookseller would have politely declined the responsibility; but there was a good deal of persuasive influence in the presence of this tall and handsome girl, with the big dark eyes and the sweetly parted lips. He did not even laugh at her. He was most kind and patient in making suggestions, and in taking her round the shelves. And at last she pounced upon the proper book in triumph; for she remembered to have heard Mr. Drummond complaining that Mr. Darwin's last book had not arrived from the library, and here were the two green volumes of "The Descent of Man" staring her in the face.

"I am sorry to have given you so much trouble," she said, with one of her sweetest smiles.

"I am sure it is no trouble at all," said the book-seller, with quite unusual emphasis; and then, when the glass doors had shut behind that beautiful vision of youthful grace, he could not help wondering who was the happy man who had won the admiration and reverence of so lovely a creature.

So Violet and her treasures were bundled into the ancient four-wheeler; and once more she set out for her journey. By this time the lurid and sultry evening had died down into a gloomy and thunderous darkness; and by the time she had got near to Camberwell Grove night seemed to have come on prematurely. The lamps were being lighted as the first low rumble of thunder was heard; and presently the people began to flee from the pavements, where the splashes of the rain were leaving marks of the breadth of half a crown. The cabman stopped in order to pull out a water-proof cape.

"Why don't you drive on and get underneath the trees?" she called out to him; for they were now near the foot of the Grove.

When at length he was forced to pull up under the thick branches of the tall elms, the rain was coming down in fierce, straight torrents, hissing out in the middle of the road, and rushing down the gutter in a brown flood. All the ominous stillness of the evening had gone; the wind had risen and was blowing about the summits of the elms and poplars; there was an echo of the distant thunder from time to time; the dark-green branches swayed and creaked. By slow degrees, however, all this noise and tumult ceased; there was a pattering of heavy drops in the trees, but less hissing of the rain in the road, as the cabman resumed his journey, and proceeded to urge his patient steed up the steep hill.

Now, when Violet stepped out of the cab, up there near the top of the hill, all the world had grown clear and sweet after the rain. There was a look of lingering twilight in the sky; and one or two stars were becoming visible; while the high, black branches of the trees seemed to delight in the wet, as they stretched up there into the pale serenity of the heavens. As she walked round into the garden, some quaint fancy struck her that she was herself like this sultry and sulky evening that had at last burst into torrents of rain and then become calm and serene. A great peacefulness stole in upon her heart as she passed through the small garden-gate; it seemed to her that now she was at home, and at rest. And clear and still as the sky now was, with its pale stars beginning to twinkle, it was no more clear, and still, and placid than the light that shone in her eyes when she went forward to greet her friends.

They had come out directly the shower was over, to breathe the sweet freshness of the air and the scent of the flowers. They, of course, were almost in darkness, but the small cottage was lighted up; and what could be a more cheerful picture than the open French windows of the parlor all aglow with orange light, and showing bright, warm snugness within? They were compassionating her on having encountered the fierce storm. She felt as though she would gladly have encountered a dozen such storms to reach this haven of shelter and peace at last.

"Ah! you don't know," she said to Mrs. Warrener, with her arms linked in hers—"you don't know what it is to feel like getting home again."

"But I know how glad I am to hear you say that, Violet," her friend, said; "for sometimes I think you are sure in time to go away and forget all about us."

"Yes—when I am dead," said the girl. "Not before then."

They went indoors, and when Violet had put her hat aside, she sat down to the piano, and asked Amy to sing to her. She suggested the song too, for she began to play "Home, Sweet Home;" and then the companion of her school-girl days sung, in a simple, tender fashion, the old familiar ballad. What was James Drummond doing meanwhile? He was lying back in his easy-chair, regarding rather wistfully the figure at the piano, and saying to himself,

"Is it possible, then, that this girl has never had the sensation of being at home and at peace except in the house of people who are little more than strangers to her?"

She came away from the piano, and sat down on a stool which was lying on the hearth-rug.

"You don't think it a very clever song!" she said to him, timidly: it was a sort of apology for asking a person of his superior culture to listen to school-girl sentiment.

"I don't think cleverness has much to do with it," said he. "Did you ever carefully read the words of a song that pleased you? Does anybody? No no. A chance phrase of tenderness touches you; and you give up all the rest—you are fascinated by some note of farewell, let us say, at the beginning of the lyric, and you forget afterward to look particularly at the despairing sighs, and the raging main, and the usual stock-in-trade of the song-writer. That is how I look at it, anyway. The song-writer has only to catch you with a bit of melody, or sentiment, and you don't search for sense subsequently. But, indeed, I have always had a suspicion of rhymed poetry—"

Here she clasped her hands over her knees. She had started him off. She was happy.

"I have always a sort of suspicion that the man has been led to overstate, or understate, or invent a new theory altogether, at the diabolical temptation of a rhyme or a particularly catching phrase. I can not be sure of it; but I always suspect it; don't you see? I believe that the suggestion of a happy rhyme is responsible for many a brilliant flight of fancy and for many a poetical assertion that is now taken to be full of a deep philosophy. Oh, by-the-way, about those lyrics; don't you notice how many of the Scotch songs consist of nothing but one or two catching phrases continually repeated? The phrase is something, to sing, something a mother could dandle a baby to; there is no sense in the repetition, no story to tell—nothing, in fact; but the song passes muster as a fine song, for all that. But talking about songs is like scraping a rose-leaf to see where the color is. Why did you leave the piano, Violet? Won't you sing something now?"

"Ah! no," she said. "My songs are all wicked songs: they are all about drinking and fighting; for I used to wish I could be a student at a German university—that was about the only ambition I ever had—and be able to drink flagons of beer, and fight with broadswords, and sing the Burschenlieder. My songs are mostly Burschenlieder now—they are too stormy for such a quiet, pleasant evening. I propose that we go on chatting. Mr. Drummond, do you really think there was ever such a person as Ossian?"

But this bid for the higher criticism was too obvious: Mr. Drummond burst into a fit of laughter.

"Miss Violet," said he, "you shall not induce me to talk your head off. My dear friends, we will postpone our lecture on Ossian until we can look across the blue hills of Morven—more especially as I hear the humble but useful Mary rattling the supper things about the place."

At this moment, indeed, Mary came into the room, and began to lay the cloth.

"You were speaking of the Highlands," said Violet, timidly.

"Yes," said he, "I fear we are discounting all the pleasures of the expedition by continually dreaming and dreaming of it."

"Oh, I am sure not," she said, rather wistfully. "It will be most enjoyable for you, I know."

"But do you know this also," said he, "that I am taking it for granted you are coming with us too?"

"James," his sister remonstrated, "before you can take that for granted you must speak to Lady North."

"I should like to go," Violet said; and thereafter she was rather silent for a time.

There were but two things on which James Drummond prided himself—his judgment of landscapes and his method of making a salad. On the present occasion this latter task, as well as that of preparing some claret-cup, kept him busily occupied for several minutes, during which time nothing further was said about that projected journey northward. But by-and-by, as they all sat comfortably round the white little table, he began. It is highly probable that he himself imagined a general conversation was going on about the sea, and the hills, and shooting, and sailing, whereas, as a matter of fact, not a human being spoke but himself, the others being only too delighted to listen. For, as he rambled on, it seemed as if there was a sound like the lapping of sea-waves in his talk—just as there is in the Mermaid's song in "Oberon"—and his mute audience saw, as he himself seemed to see, a succession of pictures—the early morning, with the scent of sweet-brier in the garden, and the gray mists rising from the far shoulders of Morven—the glad forenoons up on the warm hills, with the ring of the blue sea all round the land—the idling in the big boat with the long lines over the side, as the red sun went down in the west and all the water became as fire—the delightful walks at night-time, by the shore, with the sea plashing, and the cool winds stirring the scents of the bushes, and the stars overhead. These were pleasant things to think of and to hear of in the hopeless wilderness of London. They forgot the gas-lamps, and the crowded hovels, and the squalor and din; for they were looking into an enchanted land, filled with clear sunshine and the fresh winds from the sea. And, somehow or other, whether intentionally or not, Mr. Drummond did take it for granted that Violet North was to be with them. She would see this, and go there; she would have to hear this, and be prepared for that. At last she cried out,

"Oh, I wish it were all true! I wish I were going with you!"

"And so you are," said he, promptly.

"Lady North is going to Venice," Violet said, with a sigh.

"Let her," he exclaimed, recklessly.

"But I am afraid we must all go—unless she and I happen to have a fight before then, and then she will be glad to get rid of me. It is—a great—temptation," she added, thoughtfully.

"What is?" he asked, though he guessed her meaning, for he saw a mischievous smile about the corners of her mouth.

"No," she said, with a sudden decision, "it would not be fair to get up a quarrel in order to get away. She has tried to be very civil to me; and I must try to be civil too. But it is hard work to be civil to some people."

They had some further talk about this Northern excursion, however, and it was easy to see how anxious the girl was to go with them. She seemed to cling to them somehow, as though they were her only friends. When she was told that the cab was at the door, she rose from the table with a sigh; she was tearing herself away from the one place in the world where she found peace, homeliness, unworldly friends, and sweet guidance.

By-and-by that jolting vehicle was rattling along the noisy streets, past the glare of lighted shops and dingy groups of human beings. Already it seemed to her that she had left far behind her all that she knew of gentleness, and quiet, and tender companionship. That small household with its knightly feeling, its unworldly ways, its helpfulness, and charity, and wise counsel—that indeed was home to her; and as she thought of it, the refrain of an old German song—not one of the Burschenlieder—seemed to speak to her, and the speech was sad enough:

"*Far away—in the beautiful meadows—is the house of my home. Many a time I went out from it into the valley—O you beautiful valley! I greet you a thousand times. Farewell, farewell!*"

CHAPTER XV.

MISTAKEN GUESSES.

On the same evening George Miller hurried along to his club to dress for a small dinner party to which he had been invited by one of his fellow-members. He was angry and indignant. He would no longer be subject to the caprice of any woman. Of course, it flattered a girl's vanity to sue for her hand, and meekly submit to any condition she might impose; but he would have no more of that. It was an unsatisfactory bargain in which the concession was all on one side. Did she imagine that he would enter upon the duties of a long courtship, without the least intimation from her that any thing would come of it? Was he to pledge himself, while she remained absolutely free?

His host on this occasion was a Mr. Arthur Headley, a gentleman who had somehow or other made a large fortune in Australia, and come home to spend it. He was a singularly handsome man, six feet two in height, muscular, lithe, with fairly good features, and a magnificent brown beard. A maid-servant conversant with modern fiction would have called him a demi-god. It is true, he was rather a fool—indeed, his brain seemed to have undergone but little modification in its transmission from the microcephalous ape; but then he was a very amiable and good-natured person. There was but one spice of malice in his nature; and that declared itself in his treatment of the secretary of the club. He generally spent the day in worrying that harmless official. All his literary faculty was employed in composing essays of complaint to be laid before the committee. There was ordinarily more writing on the back than on the front of his dinner-bills. When he walked in the park, in deep meditation, the chances were a hundred to one he was trying to invent some peculiarly cutting phrase to describe the disgracefully shabby appearance of the ash-trays in the smoking-room, or the shamelessly careless fashion in which the evening papers were stitched through the middle. Even demi-gods of six feet two must have an occupation.

They dined in a private room, and the talk was general. If Mr. Miller wished to forget the fickle race of womankind, here was an opportunity. The table was brilliantly lighted; the service was quick, silent, efficient; the conversation was of a simple and ingenuous character. Indeed, under the presidency of Mr. Headley, the talk chiefly ran upon the internal arrangements and comparative merits of other clubs, and was directed to show that no institution was so badly managed as the Judæum. One admired the white and gold of the morning-room at the United Universities'; another rather preferred the ecclesiastical gloom of the Junior Universities'; another lamented the absence of a good entrance-hall; and a fourth, when the steward's tariff was under discussion, suddenly exclaimed,

"Why, God bless my soul! do you know they give you cold beef and a pint of claret at the Reform for one-and-twopence—one shilling and twopence for your lunch?" After which there was a pause of awe-struck silence.

By-and-by, however, when a little wine had been drunk, every body wished to talk, except one; and so the conversationalists inadvertently split themselves up into small groups. That one was Mr. Miller. He was rather gloomy. He did not seem to take much interest in what was going on; he listened, in an abstracted fashion, to this or that controversy about wine, or yachts, or boot-makers, and heeded but little.

Suddenly, however, he heard something that made his heart jump.

"Who is that tall girl with the white feather," asked a gentleman on the other side of the table—some one having been talking of the Park—"who drives the pair of grays?"

"Oh, don't you know?" said Mr. Headley, carelessly. "She's a daughter of North, the railway-man."

"She's an uncommonly good-looking girl, that's all I know. She has only come quite lately into the Park."

"Well, for my part," said the host, "I don't see any body to come near Lady—"

"Headley," broke in young Miller, with intemperate wrath, "we will drop this, if you please. I happen to know Miss North."

There was an embarrassed pause; the announcement of the price of cold beef at the Reform Club could not have excited more surprise.

"My dear fellow," said Headley, good-naturedly, "I beg a thousand pardons; and I envy you."

So the little incident passed off quietly enough; but was it not apparent to every one present that there was some special reason for the high color on the young man's face? Of course, if they had known that he was acquainted with Miss North, they would not have spoken of her; but had they said any harm of her? Would he have been as angry over the mention of the name of the Princess of Wales, or Lady Dudley, or Baroness Burdett-Coutts? They drew their own conclusions.

And as for him—this chance mention of Violet did not increase his happiness. It was evident, then, that she was attracting attention, as was natural. Whatever imagination he had was inflamed by a sudden and secret fire of jealousy; and a thousand devils appeared in the smoke. He hated even the innocent person on the other side of the table who had betrayed interest in Miss North by asking her name. He hated the idle, lolling crowds in the Park, who stared, and criticised, and—worst of all—admired.

Well, as soon as dinner was over, and his companions went up to the smoking-room, he stole off for a few minutes, and sat down to write a letter to Violet North. It was a very penitent letter. He confessed that he had been impatient and unreasonable. If she would forgive him this time, he would not again ask her for any pledge or assurance. She should be perfectly free. He would be content if she in the mean time would give him only her friendship, and would take his chance of the future. And was she going to the flower-show at South Kensington on Thursday?

This letter he sent up to Euston Square by the club commissionnaire, so that Violet received it when she returned in her four-wheeler from visiting her friends in the South. Now she was in a very gentle frame of mind—she generally was after seeing them. It was evident the young man was grieved about their quarrel; and she was sorry to have given him pain. She did not sit down to answer the letter there and then; but she resolved that the reply should be a kind and friendly one.

He received her note the following evening; he had been early at his rooms to wait for it. It was the first scrap of her writing that had come into his possession: a thrill went through his heart even as he looked at his own name outside written by her hand. He opened the envelope quickly; his eyes seemed to catch the sense of the page before he had time to read the lines; he knew at least she was not deeply offended. He read the letter, and then got up and went to the window, and stared down into Half Moon Street. He read it again, and kept staring at the paper, mechanically noticing the curious fashion (apparently French) in which she formed her capital *I*'s. He read it over two or three times, and yet seemed possessed with the notion that he ought to discover more from these simple words.

There was, indeed, a studied simplicity about them. She told him, briefly and plainly, that she hoped they would remain good friends; that the cause of this recent disagreement was well known to both of them, and could be avoided; and that she was very glad he had pointed out to her the necessity of guarding against misconstruction.

He was very soon to find out what the last phrase meant.

Violet went with Lady North and her daughters to the flower-show, and there, naturally enough, was Mr. George Miller, very smartly dressed, a trifle self-conscious, and obviously anxious to be attentive to the whole party. The bright summer-day, the rich masses of colors, the sweet and ever-varying perfumes, and the cheerful music outside—all this was pleasant enough; and Violet, who was not sated with the ordinary sights and occupations of London life, was enjoying herself thoroughly, and was most friendly in her treatment of him. A rumor that some royal personages had arrived, and were going through one of the tents, caused a gentle rush of the crowd in that direction, and with the crowd went Lady North and her daughter; so that inadvertently Violet and Mr. Miller were left by themselves, if not quite alone. That did not make any alteration in her manner—she was deeply interested at the moment in a sensitive-plant—but it did in his.

"Violet," said he, in a low voice, "I have nothing of yours that—that I can keep by me. Will you give me a flower?"

She turned round with something of coldness in her manner.

"That would be flirtation, would it not?" she asked, with some dignity.

"What is the use of raking up that quarrel?" he said, in an injured way. "I thought that was to be forgotten."

"Yes," she answered, in the same measured and clear fashion, "but not the lesson of it. I think it is better we should have a distinct understanding about that. I do not wish to do any thing you can reproach me with afterward; for who can tell what may happen?"

Her meaning was clear enough. She was determined to give him none of that "encouragement" on which he might presume to found a claim, or to substantiate a charge of fickleness and treachery. It came to this then: if he liked to have their present relations continue, well and good; but it was distinctly to be recognized that she was not responsible. Now this was an intelligible position to be taken up by a young woman who did not find that she cared about a young man to that degree which would warrant her in encouraging his hopes; but it could not be expected to recommend itself to the young man.

"I think you are very hard on me," said he, rather gloomily.

"Oh, don't think so!" she said, quickly, with an anxious kindness in her eyes. "I don't mean to be so, at any rate. But it is not fair to you, nor to myself, that—that—"

"I see how it is," he said bitterly. "You can not forgive me for that one phrase."

"Indeed I have," she said, earnestly. "Only it opened my eyes. Perhaps I was wrong in letting you go to papa. But you know you told me that I was absolutely unpledged—that it was all a 'perhaps'—that you were quite content to wait and see—"

"And so I am!" he said, with unusual decision of manner, and his voice was low and rapid. "I don't care what happens: I am too deeply pledged already; you can be as free as you like. Men have done more foolish things for smaller prizes. I will take my chance. And yet, I don't think most girls are as hard as that—"

"I will give you a flower, if you wish it," she said.

She looked around, and at length descried a bit of blossom that had fallen or been cut off.

"Will that do?" she asked.

He took it from her, threw it on the ground, and kicked it aside.

"I don't want it from you in that way. I will wait until you can give me a flower without looking as if I had put you on the tread-mill."

"Ah, well," she said, with a sigh, "I am sorry we should quarrel so. Shall we go and see where Lady North has gone?"

"Violet!" he said, "I—I beg your pardon. I don't wish to quarrel; but yet it seems hard that you should be so proud and indifferent—and I get angry, that's a fact—but I am very sorry. Come, let us be friends again."

"Very well," she said.

"Give me another bit of flower?"

She began to laugh.

"Isn't this just a little too childish? You make me think I am back at Miss Main's again, and quarreling over a bit of slate-pencil. The flowers don't belong to me."

"It may be childish, and very ridiculous, to you; but it isn't quite so to me. However, I will wait for that flower. Perhaps you will give it to me some day."

"I suppose you mean to tease me until I do?"

"If I thought that would get it for me, I would."

"I have heard of girls being teased into an engagement—giving in through sheer weariness. I think it is rather dangerous. I should fancy the man would take his revenge out after the marriage; for of course he would look on her previous disinclination as mere perversity."

"I wish you would give me the chance," he said, with a bright look on his face. "You would see what revenge I should take."

The aspiration was an honest one. Young Miller had a fair and moderate notion of his own merits. He knew he could not paint fine pictures of his sweetheart, or write poetry about her, or do any thing particularly romantic or imaginative; but he had heard in his time of these *dilettante* fellows marrying the objects of their adoration only to neglect them for flirtations with other women. He, now, was a plain and practical person; but he could assure his wife an honest and attentive husband, who would work hard for her, and see that she lived in good style. If he only had the chance, as he said, Violet would see what a husband he would make.

Unfortunately this remark of his only alarmed her. It seemed as though, whatever she might say to him, the conversation always led up to this one point; and the girl naturally blamed herself for so "encouraging" him. She immediately became rather reserved in manner, and insisted on going off in search of her friends.

They found them easily enough; but, in strolling about the grounds, Mr. Miller had plenty of opportunities of talking to Violet by herself.

"I suppose you are going to the Royal Academy conversazione?" said he.

"Would it be making an appointment if I said I was?" she asked, with gentle malice.

"No, it would not; for I haven't got a card."

"Then I am going. Lady North will take Anatolia and me; papa doesn't care about it."

"I should like to go," young Miller said, wistfully. "I suppose Mr Drummond would let me have his card for once?"

"I hope you won't ask him," said Violet, sharply.

"Why not?" he said, innocently. "It is no novelty to him. He knows all those artist-fellows. What is a conversazione more or less to him? He does not go to one-fifth of the places he is asked to."

"You have no right to demand such a favor," she said. "Besides, the cards are sent to particular people: they are not to be bandied about like that. And I know that Mr. Drummond is going."

"Oh, you know he is going?"

"Yes. But I know he would give the card to any body who asked him—if that is allowed: so I hope you won't ask him."

"You seem very anxious to see him."

"Yes, I am—at least, not anxious; but, of course, I hope to see him."

"Oh, well," said Mr. Miller, carelessly, "I can easily get a card, if I want to go, without asking Mr. Drummond. I know a two-penny-half-penny sort of a fellow called Lavender, who is good at every thing but earning a farthing of his own money, and he will get me a card. I suppose a hundred will go to look at the princes, and one to look at the pictures."

"Then, I hope you will be that one," said Violet, sweetly.

"You know what I shall go for," he said; and she turned away at that: the conversation had again led up to one of those awkward climaxes, which seemed to pledge her more and more, however definitely she protested.

So the days went by at this time; the young man paying her very nearly as much attention as though an engagement had existed between them; she secretly fearing, and yet sheltering herself behind repeated explanations that she was absolutely free, and unprejudiced by any of his hopes and aspirations. Occasionally, of course, she could not help being kind to him: for she really liked him; and his patient devotion to her moved her pity. Many a time she wished he would go; and then she hesitated to inflict on him the pain of dismissal. It was altogether a dangerous position.

The days going by, too, were gradually bringing the London season to an end; and people were talking of their autumn tours. Violet had not ventured to ask Lady North to let her accompany Mrs. Warrener to the Highlands; but she had spoken about this trip, and hinted that she would rather be going thither than to Venice. Mrs. Warrener had not ceased to entreat her to come with them.

One bright forenoon a pair of small grays were being driven briskly up Camberwell Grove by a young lady, who seemed pleased enough with her task. It was a fresh clear day in July; the yellow road ascending before her was barred across by the gray shadows of the chestnuts; here and there a lime-tree sweetened the air, for there had been rain in the morning. Her only companion was the man behind, who was doing his best to watch over a number of potted fuchsias, which gave him the appearance of being an elderly cupid in a grove of flowers. The phaeton was pulled up at the gate leading to a certain boarding-school; and the man, struggling out from among the fuchsias, jumped down, and went to the horse's heads.

Now, this was rather a tall and shapely young lady who went into the boarding-school; and she wore a tight-sleeved and tight-fitting dress of chocolate-colored homespun, with a broad-brimmed hat and bold feather of the Sir Joshua Reynolds period, just then coming into fashion; and altogether she presented so fine and commanding an appearance that the small school-mistress, on coming in, was overcome with astonishment, and could only say,

"Oh, Miss North!"

Yet Miss North was not an apparition—at least, apparitions do not ordinarily shake one firmly by the hand, and say, with a bright smile,

"You remember me? Have I grown? Oh, Miss Main, it is very strange to call on you; for the moment I came into the hall I fancied I was going to be punished—I suppose you remember—"

"Oh yes, I remember," said the school-mistress, with a shrewd smile; and yet she was still puzzled by the alteration in this old pupil of hers, and had scarcely the presence of mind to ask her to sit down.

"But I thought I would bring something to propitiate you," this handsome young lady continued, with the greatest self-possession and cheerfulness, "so that you won't give me twenty pages of 'Minna von Barnhelm' to translate. It is some fuchsias—they are outside: will you please to ask Elizabeth to fetch them in?"

"Oh, that is so kind of you, Miss North," said the school-mistress (she had not even yet sated her wonder and curiosity over the young lady's dress and appearance and manner); "but I suppose you don't know Elizabeth has left us. She left to get married more than a year ago."

"I thought she would," said Miss North calmly. "I used to write her love-letters for her. How much of 'Mina von Barnhelm' should I have had to translate if you had found *that* out, Miss Main?"

"Indeed," said the school-mistress, frankly, "I think you were the wickedest girl I ever had in my school."

"I am afraid you are right," said Miss North, meekly.

"But what a change there is, to be sure! That's what I often said—I often said you would never be brought under proper control until you were married—"

"But I am not married yet, Miss Main," said the young lady, with heightened color.

"It will not be long, then, I dare say," replied the school-mistress.

"Indeed, it will be a very long time—it will be always and altogether," said Miss North, promptly.

"You mean never to get married?"

"Certainly."

After that, Miss Main thought she might as well send for the fuchsias; and when the flowers were brought in, she was greatly pleased by this instance of friendliness on the part of her old pupil, and she would have had her sit down, and have some strawberries and cake. But Miss North could not wait to partake of these earthly joys.

"I am going on at once to Mr. Drummond's," she said.

"Mr. Drummond is not at home," said Miss Main, hoping to have an opportunity of showing Lady North's daughter to a later generation of scholars; "I saw him pass here about an hour ago."

"I know," said Violet; "this is the morning he goes to that society in Jermyn Street. It is Mrs. Warrener I am going to see."

So, with many a friendly word, and promise to repeat the visit, she got into the phaeton again and drove on up the hill. She found Mrs. Warrener alone, as she had expected. She took off her hat and put it on the table. Then she proposed they should go out into the garden.

"For I have something of great importance to say to you," she said, solemnly.

"Indeed!" remarked Mrs. Warrener, expecting to hear of another quarrel with Lady North.

"Oh, it is no laughing matter," Violet said at once. "It is simply this: Am I or am I not to get engaged to Mr. Miller?"

"Violet!" exclaimed Mrs. Warrener, astounded by the girl's direct habit of speech. "You can not be talking seriously. Why should you ask such a question of me?"

"Because I have no one else to go to for advice," she answered, simply.

"But surely that is a matter on which no girl needs advice. It ought to be determined by your own feelings."

"If that were all, I should have no difficulty," said the young lady, not without some pride in her tone. "I don't wish to marry any body. I would rather be free from all the —the bother and persecution—"

"Then why should you suffer it?"

"Well," said she, looking down, "perhaps you may have partly brought it on yourself by your own carelessness; and you don't wish to—to appear—unkind—"

They had now got out into the garden.

"Violet," Mrs Warrener said, distinctly, "this is the question: Do you really care for him?"

"N-no," the girl stammered.

"Then why not tell him so?"

"You can not be going about insulting your friends in that way."

"All your friends are not asking you to marry them."

"Oh, that is a different matter," said Violet, earnestly. "He does not ask me to marry him—not at all. This that he is always asking for is only an engagement; and I am not to be bound by it in any way—"

"Now, what do you really mean?" her friend said, seriously. "Or what can he mean by such proposals? What sort of an engagement is it that binds him, and leaves you free? And what sort of an engagement is it that does not promise marriage?"

"Well, that is what he proposes," said Violet, doggedly. "He knows quite well that I will not promise to marry him; for I do not wish to marry any body. And he does not even talk of that now."

They walked about for a bit, Mrs Warrener saying nothing. At last she said,

"I think I see how it is. The notion of marriage frightens you—or you are too proud to like the idea of the submission and surrender of marriage—and Mr. Miller, being a shrewd young man, has found that out, so he wants you to enter into a vague engagement—which will not frighten you, or alarm you about the loss of your independence; and you apparently don't quite know what it means. Take care!"

"Oh, but you don't know, Mrs. Warrener," the girl said, quite humbly, "you don't know what I think about these things, if you fancy I am so proud as that, or that I should like to be always independent. If I were to marry any man, I should like to feel myself quite helpless beside him—looking to him always for guidance and wisdom—I should be his one worshiper, and every thing he might do would be right to me. I should be ashamed of myself to even dream of independence. But then—but then—" she added, with her eyes still cast down, "the men you can admire and trust like that are not often met with: at least, for my part, I have only—"

"You must have met one, anyway," said Mrs. Warrener, with a kindly smile.

"Oh no, not necessarily," the girl said, almost with alarm. "It is a fancy of mine: you know the nonsense that gets into a school-girl's head."

Mrs. Warrener, with such ability as she possessed, and with a wonderful and friendly patience, was trying to understand this girl and her odd and apparently contradictory sentiments. The only key to these that the worthy little woman could find was this: Here was a proud, self-willed girl, who had a sweetheart whom she regarded with a more tender affection than she cared to disclose. Like most girls, she chose to be very reticent on that point; if questioned, she would answer with a stammering "N-no." On the other hand, the sweetheart is impatient of these mystifications, and wishes her to promise to marry him. She rebels against this pressure put upon her; treats him with undeserved coldness, but, all the same, comes to a friend to see what the world would think of her entering into some sort of engagement. She wishes some one to tell her she can enter into this engagement without exposing herself to the suspicion—against which she revolts—that her secret affection is stronger than her pride.

Such was Mrs. Warrener's theory. It was ingenious enough, and it was but a natural deduction from what she had seen of the conduct of many girls in similar circumstances, only it was altogether wrong in the case of Violet North, and it was the parent of a terrible amount of mischief.

"Violet," said she, in her kindly way, "it is no use my advising you, for a girl never quite tells you what her real feelings are about a young man. You said you did not care about Mr. Miller—"

"Perhaps I ought to have said that I like him very well," she said, looking down. "There is no doubt about that. I like him far better than any of the young men I have met, for he is less languid, and he does not patronize you, and talk to you as if you were a baby; he is earnest and sincere—and then, when you see how anxious he is to be kind to you—"

"Ah, yes," said Mrs Warrener, with some little show of triumph, "I thought there was something behind all that reluctance of yours, Violet. It is the way with all you girls. You will admit nothing. You don't care for anybody. You positively hate the notion of being married. But, all the same, you go and submit to be married, just like your mothers before you, and there is an end of pretense then."

"I hope you don't think, Mrs. Warrener," said the girl, with flushed cheeks, "that I have been asking you to advise me to get married?"

"No, no, Violet," her friend said, gently. "You wouldn't do that. But I think I can see the end of all this hesitation."

"What end, then?"

"You will marry Mr. Miller."

"I am not married to Mr. Miller yet," she said, almost coldly; and then she abruptly changed the subject.

Another part of her mission was to deliver an invitation to her two friends in the South to dine at Euston Square on the evening of the Royal Academy *soiree.* Sir Acton would be up in Yorkshire; perhaps Mr. Drummond would kindly assume the guardianship of the small party of ladies. Mrs. Warrener could not, of course, answer for her brother, but she was sure he would do anything to please Violet.

Then the young lady went her way. Why did she drive so fast?—her mouth proud and firm, her figure erect.

"I am not married yet"—this was what she was saying to herself—"they will have to wait a little while before they see me married!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AMONG SOME PICTURES.

THIS almost seemed a small family party that was met round Lady North's dinner-table; and it was, in any case, a sufficiently merry one. Mr. Drummond was in one of his gravely extravagant moods; and Lady North, following his whimsicalities as far as her fancy permitted, was amused, in a fashion, though she was very often puzzled. For who could tell whether this bright-eyed man, with his discursive talk, his impossible stories, his sham advice, was in jest or earnest? Violet was delighted; perhaps the occasional bewilderment of Lady North did not lessen her enjoyment.

"But did you never hear," said he, when his hostess was complaining seriously about the way in which certain groceries or other things were adulterated; "did you never hear, Lady North, of the man who starved himself rather than be cheated?"

"N-no," said she, with wide eyes.

Violet smiled to herself. She knew there was no such person. There never had been any such person. He was continually lugging in imaginary men of straw, and making them toss their impossible arms about.

"Oh yes," he continued, calmly; "he was a very strict and just man, and he was so indignant over the way this tradesman and the next tradesman cheated him, that he cut off the supplies, one after the other, to revenge himself on them. First the butcher went, because he was always sending in short measure. Then the baker went, because of alum and other tricks. At last this man was living on nothing but milk, when it occurred to him to have the milk analyzed. There was about thirty per cent. added water in it; and that went to his heart. His last hope was gone. To spite the milkman, he resolved to cut off the milk too: and so he shut himself up in a room, and died; his protest could go no farther than that. You see, Lady North, we must make up our mind to be cheated a good deal; and to take it with a good temper. An equable temper is the greatest gift a man can possess. I suppose you've heard of the duke who had every thing he could desire, and who died of anxiety?"

Violet nearly burst out laughing this time. Of course there was no such duke.

"Oh yes; he was so afraid of having his pictures, and rare engravings, and old jewelry burned, that he set about getting them all in duplicate; and he had a duplicate house built to receive them. But of course it was no use. He could not get complete sets of the engravings; and he used to wander about Italian towns searching for old glass and jewelry until he grew to be a haggard and awful skeleton. Care killed him in the end. If you keep brooding over all the possibilities of life, you can.not avoid being miserable. I once knew a man—"

Still another? Violet began to think of the dozen "supers" in the theatre, who are marched round and round the scenery, to represent the ceaseless procession of an army.

"—who used to be quite unhappy whenever he eat a herring; for he used to wonder whether a herring ever had rheumatism, and then he considered how dreadfully a herring must suffer in such a case, from the quantity of bones it had.

But of course you can not always command your fancies, and say that you will be free from anxiety; and the most helpless time I know is early in the morning, if one has wakened prematurely, and can not get to sleep again. Then a touch of hoarseness in the throat conjures up visions of diphtheria; and if you cannot recollect some trifling matter, you begin to look on the lapse of memory as a warning of complete mental breakdown and insanity. Every thing is bad, then; all your affairs are going to the dogs; you have offended your dearest friend. But at breakfast-time, don't you wonder how you could have been so foolish as to vex yourself about nothing? The increased vitality of the system clears the brain of forebodings. There are other times, too, in which the imagination is stronger than the reason. I once knew a very learned man—"

Another!

"—who decared to me that sea-sickness was in nine cases out of ten a matter of apprehension; and that he knew he could argue himself into a quiescent mood that would defy the waves. But just as we were going on board the boat, he looked up and saw a cloud sailing smoothly along; and I could see he was thinking with a great longing how fine it would be to lie down in that cloud and be taken quietly across—"

"Was he ill in crossing?" demanded the literal little woman at the head of the table.

Mr. Drummond started. He had conjured up the incident so far, but he knew nothing further.

"I don't know," he said; and Lady North wondered how a reasonable person could tell a story and leave out its chief point of interest.

That evening a young man was flitting rather restlessly about the entrance-hall of Burlington House, watching the successive carriages come up, and the successive parties of ladies, with their long trains flowing on the stairs, pass up to have their names announced above. He kept looking at his watch; then at the next carriage that came up; and was altogether restless and dissatisfied.

At length, however, a particular carriage came rolling into the court-yard, and he swiftly went down the broad stone steps. He himself opened the door. Who was the first to step out into the light? A tall young girl, who had apparently had her dress designed by an artist, for it was all of a radiant lemon-yellow silk, the sleeves alone, near the shoulder, being slashed with black velvet; while in her jet-black masses of hair were intertwined leaves and blossoms of the yellow-white jassamine. She looked surprised.

"Then you have come, after all?" she said, when he was assisting her three companions out of the carriage.

"Yes," he said; adding, "How fortunate I should meet you here, Lady North! You have no one with you?"

"Oh yes," said Lady North. "Mr. Drummond is coming directly, in a hansom."

"I think we had better go in," said the young man: "he will find you readily enough when he comes."

"Oh no," remarked the young lady with the pale-yellow flowers in her hair—and she spoke with some decision—"we shall wait for him here. I particularly wish Mr. Drummond to take Lady North through the people, because he knows every one."

Well, the young man had no objection to that; for, of course, he would be left in charge of the others. Then Mr. Drummond came up, light-hearted, buoyant, and careless; and indeed it seemed to the younger man that this tall and good-humored person, when he undertook to escort a party of ladies to the Royal Academy conversazione, might at least have taken the trouble to tie his neck-tie a little more accurately.

They passed up the stairs. They caught a glimpse of many faces and bright lights. Their names were announced; Sir Francis, standing near the door, shook hands with Mr. Drummond as with an old friend; they made their way along the narrow lane that had been formed by people curious to see the new arrivals. Which of this party attracted most attention? Mrs. Warrener, who was by the side of Violet, knew well—whether or not the girl herself was aware—how all eyes followed her as she passed.

If she was aware of it, she was not much embarrassed. They had scarcely got well into the miscellaneous crowd when she suddenly caught her companion's arm.

"Listen!"

There was a sound of soft and harmonious music, the deep voices of men, and the playing of instruments; and then high above that, rising as it were to the vaulted roof, the clear singing of boys—singing as with the one strong, high, and sweet voice of a woman.

"Where are they singing?" Violet asked; and then she led her companions to the central hall, where, with all manner of busts and figures looking strangely down on them, the crowd stood in a circle round the Artillery band, the boys in the centre. By this time Violet and her companion had got separated from Mr. Drummond and Lady North; Mr. George Miller was paying compulsory attention to his friend Anatolia.

But this division of the party did not last, of course, the whole evening. Its various members met and parted in new combinations, as various objects of attraction suggested; this one lost in admiration of the music; the other fascinated by particular costums; a third anxious that every body should see his or her favorite picture. On one of these occasions Mr. Drummond and Violet together happened to be looking at a picture based on the tragic death of Helen of Kirkconnell.

It is now two or three years since this picture was exhibited, and I must not hazard overpraise of its merits; but, at all events, it endeavored to give visible form to what (as it seems to some of us) is the most passionate and pathetic utterance of human emotion in all modern literature—if this wild, sharp cry of anguish is to be called literature. Moreover, it dealt only with one episode in the brief tragedy, where Helen of Kirkconnell—Burd Helen she is called in some of the versions—is walking with her lover in the evening, and suddenly throws herself before him to receive the death-shot fired at him by his rejected rival: it does not deal with the fiercer portion that follows.

"Oh think na but my heart was sair"

—this is the pathetic introduction to the wild, glad deed of vengeance—

"When my love fell and spake nae mair;
I laid her down wi' meikle care,
On fair Kirconnell lea.

"I laid her down: my sword did draw,
Stern was our fight by Kirtleshaw:
I hewed him down in pieces sma',
For her that died for me."

"It is a sad story," Drummond said, absently, when he had told it to her.

"I do not think that," she answered, quickly; and he was surprised to see that her face was quite pale, and her dark eyes full of tears. "I think these are the two very happiest people I ever heard of in the world."

She stopped for a moment: he dared not look, for he guessed that the proud lips were trembling.

"Don't you?" she said, boldly. "A woman who is able to die for the man she loves, a man who has the delight of killing the man who slew his sweetheart: I think they have had every thing that life can give. But—but that was in the old time; there is no more of that now; when people care for each other now, it is a very gentle affection, and they are more concerned about having a good income, and being able to drive in the Park—"

"But people who drive in the Park may love each other," he said.

"I don't believe it," she said, and then she abruptly turned away.

Mr. George Miller came up.

"Violet," he said, in a gentle and tender voice, "do come over here and look at this picture. I think it is awfully good."

She crossed the room proudly and silently. Mr. Miller led her to a very nice and pleasing composition, which had rather won upon his heart, and which—who knows?—he may have thought would have a similar influence on her. It represented a quiet nook on the Thames, with a long pleasure-boat moored in at the roots of the trees, and in the boat were two very pretty young ladies and a good-looking young fellow—he was not unlike Miller himself—in boating-flannels and a straw hat. The picture was called "Meditation." There was a luncheon-basket, half opened, in the stern of the boat.

"Now, that is what I call real life," said Mr. Miller. "That is the sort of thing you actually see Just look at that swan; you would think he was going to open his mouth for a biscuit."

"That is the sort of picture I hate," she said, with unnecessary vehemence; and he was considerably startled; "and I hate the people quite as much who could live such a trivial, dawdling, purposeless sort of life. I wonder what they are *meditating* on! Very pretty *meditations* they are likely to have! On the advisability of eating lobster-salad? On the sweet poetry the curate quoted on Sunday? On the chances of their winning gloves at Goodwood? And as for him, a tailor's window would be the most suitable place in the world for him."

He was astounded by this outburst; he could not understand what it meant.

"You are rather savage to-night," said he, coldly. "I don't see that the man has done you any harm by painting a pretty picture."

"I detest such pictures."

"Well, you needn't look at them, if they offend you."

"I must look at them when I am asked to do so, and when I am told that they are beautiful."

This was rather a cruel remark; but Mr Miller unexpectedly showed good-nature.

"Well, there is no accounting for tastes," said he, pleasantly. "I like pictures like that, because I understand them. They are the sort of thing that one sees in real life. Now, I have no doubt that the solemn and mysterious business—an ugly woman with her face painted against a green sky—is very fine; but I can't see the beauty of ugliness myself."

"Where is Lady North, do you know?" she said.

"I saw her go into the next room a minute ago," he answered.

Now, if Violet had been put out of temper by being asked to look at a very harmless and innocent picture, she was restored, not only to her usual serenity, but to a quite abundant graciousness, by the news she heard when she again encountered her stepmother.

"Violet," said the little woman, "Mr. Drummond has been pressing me very hard to let you go with his sister and himself to Scotland. Would you like to go?"

"I should like very much to go."

"Well, I don't see any objection," Lady North said, "except that it is rather presuming on their hospitality—"

"Ah, they don't think of such things," said Violet, quickly.

"They are not very rich, you know."

"That is just it," the girl said, rather proudly. "It is because they are not rich that they are generous and kind to every one; they have not a thought about money—"

"Well, well," said Lady North, "they seem, in any case, to be very kindly disposed toward you; and you must go and thank them now for the invitation. There is Mr. Drummond over in the corner."

"I—would—rather go to Mrs. Warrener," said Violet, with some hesitation. "Where has she gone with Anatolia?"

Lady North was in all simplicity surprised to see the effect of this concession of hers on Violet's friends. Was it really possible that they could so much enjoy her society? They seemed to be quite grateful to her for allowing Violet to go with them; whereas she herself had been looking forward with very considerable anxiety to the necessity of taking that young lady to Italy. It was well, she thought, in any case, that the girl had taken this fancy for people who did appear to have some control over her.

Naturally enough, when all the splendor of the evening was over, and the brilliancy of the rooms exchanged for the rainy squalor of the streets, Mr Drummond and his sister, who went home in a cab, had much to say about this visit to the North, and Violet's going with them. After they got home, too, they kept chatting on about this subject; the time running away unheeded. James Drummond seemed highly pleased about the whole arrangement; and he was already painting all sorts of imaginative pictures of Violet's experiences of Highland lochs, moors, sunsets, and wild seas.

"And then," said his sister, "we must ask Mr. Miller up for a time."

"Oh certainly."

"I see," she said, with a smile, "I must get over my objection to that young man marrying Violet."

He raised his eyes quickly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well," she said, with a sort of good-natured shrug, "I believe it is inevitable now. Either they are engaged, or about to be engaged."

A quick look of pain—so sharp and rapid that she did not notice it—passed over his face.

"Has she told you so?" he said, calmly.

"No; but she came to ask my advice about it the other day; and she talked just as a girl always talks in these circumstances—pretending to care nothing for him—treating his advances as tiresome—and yet showing you quite clearly that she would be very much disgusted if he took her at her word."

"And what did you say?"

"I told her to be governed by her own feelings."

"Yes, of course," he said, absently; and he seemed to be deeply occupied in balancing a paper-knife on its edge. "I am glad her people know of Miller's expectations; that relieves us from responsibility. It will be a pretty spectacle—these two young folks in the holiday-time of their youth enjoying themselves up there in the Highlands."

"I wish she had chosen somebody else," Mrs. Warrener said, ruefully. "I suppose he is a good match; and he is very fond of her; but he is so dreadfully like every other young man."

"You must wait and see, Sarah," her brother said, gently. "Give him time."

"I would give him every thing else in the world—except our Violet," she said. "However, if young people were quite sensible, they would always be finding out defects in each other, and they would never get married at all. He is a very well-intentioned young man: I think if you advised him to become a Buddhist, he would try. We shall see what influence Violet will have on him; perhaps she will conjure up something in him a little more out of the commonplace."

She bid him good-night now—though it was very near morning—and left him alone. He sat there, lying back in his easy-chair, with his ordinarily quick and piercing eyes grown vague and distant, as if they were trying to make some mystic words out of the meaningless symbols on the wall-paper. The clock on the mantel-piece ticked gently, the slow progress of the hands being unheeded.

He rose, with the air of a man who had been in a dream, and looked round. His attention was caught by bars of blue appearing through the yellow shutters of the window; the new day was drawing near outside; almost mechanically he passed round into the hall, took his hat, and let himself quietly out.

How still it was in the half-revealed darkness! Only the topmost leaves of the tall poplars, far away up there in the blue gray, seemed to be having a low and rustling talk together; down here, amidst the darker foliage of the chestnuts, all was silence.

He walked on, quietly and aimlessly, past the voiceless houses and the gardens. Suddenly a sound made his heart leap: it was only a thrush that had burst asunder the spell of the night with the first notes of its morning song. And now there was a more perceptible light in the sky; and the stars were gone; and at last there appeared a strange violet color, tinted with rose, that shone on the windows of the eastward-looking houses. The dawn had come—after the rain of the night—clear, and coldly roseate, and still.

"So the new days come," he was thinking to himself, "and the years slip by, and God takes away our youth before we know that we have it. And if all the imaginative longing of youth—that seeks satisfaction in the melancholy of the twilight and in the murmur of the sea, and does not find it there, but must have some human object of sympathy—if that romantic wistfulness of youth clings around the form of a young girl, and endows her with all the poetry of early years, can it ever be repeated again? Love may come again, and love of a stronger, and purer, and less selfish kind; but the wonder—perhaps not! and so I imagine that the old mystery of first love never quite goes even when the love goes, and that in after-years some sudden view of the sea or a new sweet scent in the air will bring back a throb of one's twentieth year and all the half-forgotten dreams. But if a man knows all that, and has missed it, can he have even a glimpse of it in later life? There are some of us who have had no youth—only hours, and days, and years; the wonder-time of love has never reached us; and we have learned physiology instead. I suppose all that must go. We can see the pretty pictures that young love makes; we can smile sadly at its unreasonable caprice, its wild follies, its anger, and tears of repentance. Happy youth, that knows not its own happiness—that would impatiently curtail the wonder-time—that is so eager after enjoyment that rose-leaves are dashed down of roses that will never bloom again. But, after all, to live is to live; and it is only those who are outside and apart, who are but spectators of the youth of others, who know how youth should be spent, and how grateful it should be for God's chiefest gifts."

He was neither sorrowful nor envious, to all appearance, as he walked on and communed with himself, listening to the full chorus of the now awakened birds, and watching the growing glory of the sunlight come over the green and rain-washed foliage of the trees. The tall, thin man, who stooped a little, and who walked briskly along, with one hand in his trousers-pocket, sometimes whistled absently as he went; and he had a quick attention for the flying birds, and the growing light, and the stirring of the leaves. He was all by himself in the newly awakened world; not another human being was abroad. And when he had tired himself out with his walk, he returned home with something of gladness in his worn face; for it almost seemed as if he had got rid of certain mournful fancies, and had resigned himself to the actual and sufficiently happy life of the new day—the new day that was now shining over the plains where the cattle stood, and over the orchards and farm-steads, and over the glad blue seas all breaking in white foam around our English shores.

CHAPTER XVII.

FROM NORTH TO SOUTH.

THE pronunciation of the word *allegro* is not a matter of very grave moment. A man may make a mistake about it and nevertheless be a good Christian and a loyal subject. All the same, it was this trifling affair of a wrong accent that suddenly and unexpectedly changed the whole course of Miss Violet North's life.

The girl had an impatience of pretense of all kinds which she carried to an extreme. While she was at Miss Main's school not one of the girls dared to wear a bit of sham jewelry. Now, Lady North was not a highly accomplished woman, and, like most persons of imperfect education, she had the habit of adorning her talk with scraps of languages with which she was but scantily acquainted. The resentment of Violet North against this species of affectation was implacable. It was no use telling her that human nature had developed more deadly crimes than that. It was no use urging that the difference between *állegro* and *allégro* was not a matter to keep one awake o' nights.

"Why should she use the word at all? Why should she pretend to know a language that she doesn't know? I hate the meanness of that perpetual shamming!"

And of course Lady North, again like most imperfectly educated persons, was deeply incensed when she was corrected; and out of this small matter—a long *e* or a short *e*—sprung up a quarrel which pointed to but one conclusion. The hollow truce was broken. Step-mother and step-daughter could not remain in the same house. Neither wished it, so it remained for Sir Acton North to say what was to be done.

Sir Acton was, as usual, quite submissive. He could not understand why two women should quarrel over an Italian word; but, then, he had long ago given up the hope of understanding any thing about women. He asked his wife what she wanted him to do about Violet; Lady North refused to intermeddle in that young lady's affairs in any way whatsoever. He went to Violet herself, who told him that she did not care what happened to her so long as she got out of the house. She also hinted that she was quite able to earn her own living, at which Sir Acton laughed, and went away not much enlightened.

In this extremity he bethought himself of that small household on the south of the river, in which Violet had often taken refuge, as if it were her natural home; and it occurred to him that as Mrs. Warrener and her brother had been good enough to offer to take Violet with them for their autumn holidays, they might perhaps be inclined to extend their hospitality farther, provided that some proper recompense were made them. Violet, he knew, would be amply satisfied with that arrangement; and it was an arrangement, moreover, which could only be but temporary, for, of course, the girl was sure to marry.

Sir Acton found Mr. Drummond busily engaged in greasing a pair of enormously thick shooting-boots, while a pair of very old leather leggings lay beside him on the table of the small dining-room.

"I can't shake hands with you, sir," said he, laying down his wooden pipe. "You see, we are just preparing for our plunge into an absolutely savage life; and you never can trust any body to grease your boots but yourself. I hope Miss Violet quite understands the sort of life she will lead when she comes with us!"

"It was about her I wanted to speak to you, Mr. Drummond," said Miss Violet's father; and then he sat down and told Mr. Drummond the whole story, as well as he could make it out.

This was a delicate mission on which Sir Acton had come, and several times he seemed rather embarrassed, but the quick, direct speech of Mr. Drummond helped him out.

"Do I understand you, then, that Violet is without a home?"

"She has none in prospect—that is to say, of course we could arrange about her staying with some one—"

"She can always have a home here, and a hearty welcome. My sister will assure her of that."

"I expected you would say as much; the girl is indeed fortunate in having such friends," said Sir Acton, who was really touched with the frank, unhesitating way in which the offer was made; "and I will confess that I had some notion of this when I came over to see you. Still, it is an awkward thing for one man to ask another man to take his daughter off his hands—"

"Don't speak about that. If Violet will come and live with us, we shall be glad to have her. Of course, she knows what she must expect. We are very plain-living folk, and we are not rich enough to alter our ways in entertaining a guest, although we should like to do that."

"I don't think she has found your ways unsuited to her," her father said, with a smile, "to judge by the readiness with which she always comes here. No, she has more sense than that; there is nothing of the petted child about her. But, on the other hand, Mr. Drummond," continued Violet's father, with obvious embarrassment, "you will forgive me if I suggest that—that the obligation you put me under would be too great if you did not allow me to make you—some recompense; a sum might be stated—"

He was in great dread of offending this shy, capricious, strange man, and he was greatly relieved to find Mr. Drummond, instead of drawing himself up and looking hurt, breaking out into a hearty laugh.

"No, no, Sir Acton, we don't take in boarders; and to think of our being paid for having Violet North come to live with us! But I must tell Sarah about it: excuse me for one second, Sir Acton."

Off he went, leaving the worthy and practical-minded baronet very much puzzled. It was true, he knew, that Mr. Drummond was a gentleman; but was he not also very poor? and had not the offer been made with great delicacy? and surely it was most unreasonable that this family should bear the expense of supporting a rich man's daughter. His sister returned with him. They were both of them apparently greatly delighted over this probable addition to their household. When would she come over? Would he remember to remind her of her music? Ought Mrs. Warrener to come and help her to move her small belongings? And would he make her promise before she left not to do all Amy Warrener's lessons for her, seeing that that young lady had now got out of her child-period?

Sir Acton North began to wonder less over his daughter's liking for this quiet little house and its occupants. There was a wonderful sense of homeliness about the place, and a bright, humorous frankness about this tall lounging man and his gentle sister. But, before Sir Acton left, Mr. Drummond took him aside, and said to him, with more seriousness,

"There is one point, sir, about which we ought to have a clear understanding before your daughter comes over to live with us. I believe that that young fellow Miller is, in a fashion, paying his addresses to her. That is with your sanction, I presume?"

"Why, yes," said Sir Acton, rather staggered by the directness of the question, and also by the calm, observant look of those singularly bright and intelligent eyes. "The young man saw me—that nonsense was all explained away—and indeed it was a thoughtless frolic that may be forgotten now. If the girl likes him, I see no reason why they should not marry. Do you?"

"I?" repeated Drummond, almost with a start. "What have I to do with it? It is her father who must give his consent."

"Do you know any thing against the young man?"

"Nothing in the world," was the hearty answer.

"Well, then, he is a fairly shrewd, practical-headed young fellow; he will have quite enough money; his family is respectable—I really don't see any objection."

"That is very well, Sir Acton. I merely wished to be entirely clear from all responsibility—"

"Mind you, my dear sir," broke in Sir Acton, as if he had suddenly remembered something, "don't imagine that I am anxious to get rid of my daughter—by marriage or otherwise—merely because she and her step-mother don't agree. No, no; rather than see her uncomfortable, I'd—I'd—confound it! I'd send the whole pack of 'em flying. Violet's a good girl—she's worth twenty dozen—"

But here Sir Acton thought he had said enough.

"I understand you, then, sir," said Mr. Drummond, quite calmly, "that you have no objection to Mr. Miller meeting your daughter while she is under my care; and if they should engage to marry each other, good and well?"

"I see no objection. But why do you speak of that as if it were something to be feared?"

"Pardon me; I am sure I had no such intention."

"Good-bye, Mr. Drummond," said Sir Acton, at the door; "you have done me a great kindness; I will try to repay you some day. Oh, by-the-way, I suppose I may get a saloon-carriage reserved for you when you go North?"

"No, thank you," said Mr. Drummond, quietly. "We always go second-class, and I don't think Miss Violet will expect us to alter our ordinary habits."

Next day a young lady burst into the room where Mrs. Warrener was sitting sewing, and threw herself down on her knees, and put her hands in her friend's lap.

"And oh! is it quite true? And am I to live with you always?" she cried; and the fine, frank, handsome face and the dark and eloquent eyes were full of joy and gratitude.

"You are to stay with us at long as you please," said Mrs. Warrener, much more gravely, as she kissed the girl.

Violet looked up quickly, and scanned her friend's face.

"Are you displeased with me?"

There was a gentle hand laid on her head.

"Violet, you are no longer a girl. You ought not to give way to your temper, under whatever provocation. And it does not look well to see any girl so glad to leave her home."

"I have not left my home," said the girl, in a low voice, with her head bent down; "I have come to the only home that I ever have had."

No woman could resist that speech; there was an arm round her neck in a moment, and she was listening to many a protestation that that home, at least, should never be wanting to her as long as she lived.

But the girl freed herself, and looked up again.

"And Mr. Drummond," she said, "what does he think? Does he think I have done wrong?"

"Well, he regrets what has happened, of course, although it has brought you to us. He thought you had resolved to be a little more patient, and gentle, and obedient—"

The girl rose quickly, turning her head aside; but all the same her friend had caught sight of the sudden tears that had sprung to those long black lashes.

"Violet!"

"I can go back."

"You shall not go back, Violet. Listen to reason—"

"Oh! you don't know—you don't know the life I had to lead in that house," the girl cried, passionately, with the tears running down her face; "and you think that I am proud and ungrateful: and perhaps you are afraid to take me? But I am not ungrateful to those I can love and respect—no—you will not find me that; and there is nothing I would not suffer for my real friends, as you may find out some day. But I have had no friends—you know I have had no friends—but the friends in this house; and what would I not do for them? Only to be in the house with you, I would be a kitchen drudge for you—indeed, I would; I would work my eyes blind for you; there is no patience and obedience you would not have. But I must respect and love the people whom I serve, and then I am ready to become their slave from morning till night—"

Mrs. Warrener strove to hush the wild, piteous words.

"You must not take so much to heart what I said, Violet," she remonstrated, gently. "And you won't have to do all these things in order to please your friends. Only be true to your own better nature, and you will be a constant delight to them."

The girl took up her friend's hand and kissed it: then she left the room. Mrs. Warrener understood the mute promise of obedience.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CASTLE BANDBOX, N. B.

THE great white mists of the rain had lifted; and all the world behind stood revealed—a strange, new, dream-like world, colorless, still, its various tints of gray shining with a suffused and mystic light. The gray sea was like glass; the gray islands had but a faint glimmer of green along their shores; the gray mountains were pale and distant; and, in all this vague and phantom-like picture that had been so suddenly disclosed, there was but one sharp and definite object—a coasting-vessel lying motionless out there on the shining gray sea, its hull as black as jet; its brown sails throwing perfect shadows on the mirror beneath. It was as yet early morning; no one could say whether that luminous glow throughout the gray would turn to clear sunlight, or whether the slow, soft fingers of the rain-clouds would again pass over the world-picture, obliterating successively island and mountain and sea.

Early as it was, a young lady had managed to write the following letter, which she was just putting into an envelope:

"Castle Bandbox, in the Western Highlands, 12th August.

"MY DEAR PAPA,—You have known for many a year that I am the most dutiful of daughters; so here is the account I promised you of our explorations in this wild country. It was on the evening of the 10th of August, in the present year, that we effected our disembarkation, and were most hospitably received by the inhabitants of this coast, two of whom willingly agreed (after much talk among themselves in a language we did not understand) to carry our luggage and accoutrements for us (on wheel-barrows). Throwing out a scout or two, in the shape of bareheaded children, with very brown faces, bare legs and feet, and tattered kilts, we struck a trail which eventually led us away from the coast into the mountains. By-and by we ascended, until behind us we could behold the open waters of the Atlantic, with various long and beautiful islands, and the lofty mountains of Morven and Mull; while in our front, crowning a small knoll that stands in the midst of an amphitheatre of heather-clad hills, we beheld a small, peaked, white building, which we made bold to call Castle Bandbox. By whom, or when, this solitary habitation, in the midst of the moors, was built, I do not know. We have already discovered it to be the most delightful of toy-houses, once you have got accustomed to knocking your head against the sloping roof of your bedroom.

"Scarcely had we arrived when the youngest member of the party and the writer of this narrative, leaving to our elders the business of unpacking, started off on an exploration of the adjoining mountains, the nearest of which is separated from the garden by a wire fence to keep out rabbits. The garden, I should have said, goes all round the side of the knoll: the borders of the various plots are adorned with tree-fuchsias, rose-bushes, sweet-williams, and marigolds; but the plots themselves contain such more useful plants as carrots turnips, beans, and potatoes—the last in flower. The first mountain on the other side of the wire fence we named Mount Glorioso. Its chief peculiarity is its tangle of furze, brambles, meadow-sweet, and ferns round its lower slopes; then you come to a forest of young larches, trees which tear your hair to pieces, and leave tufts of sticky white all over your clothes. Passing across the summit of this mountain, the adventurers reached another peak, which they named Mount Magnificoso: the chief peculiarity of this eminence is its immensely high heather—beautiful to look at, but desperately difficult to walk through. The third and last of this chain of mountains we ventured to call Mount Extremitoso, the chief peculiarity of which is an abundance of steep gray rocks, up which you must scramble to find yourself on a high and windy summit of close and slippery grass. We got no farther than that.

"But oh, papa, if you could see what we saw then—what we can see now from the windows of this place—the long stretches of sea, and the distant mountains that appear to rise right out of the water, and that change in color every minute of the day! I remember, just as we were getting to the station, Mr. Drummond saying to me, 'You will find a difference between Euston Square and Morven;' but I had no idea of what a difference. Not that he ever speaks disrespectfully of Euston Square; on the contrary, he says one ought to grow very wise living there—looking on at the mutability of life—the coming and going of cabs and carriages, some people with dogs and guns, and others with coffins. And did you ever notice simple country-people asking the way to Holborn or London Bridge, and then setting out to walk there with all their luggage, just as if they were going round a corner in a village? Mr. Drummond says he has seen them; but he is a very imaginative man. Oh, by-the-way, did you ever notice, papa, the architecture of St. Pancras Church—the steeple and the stone woman, especially? I have found out that is the only way of enraging him—to talk about St. Pancras Church, and say you rather like it.

"We have the most delightful evenings—so cheerful and homely; and although Mr. Drummond professes to have become a thorough savage, and to have forsworn all book and writing, and to be interested only in cartridges and setters, and so forth, in the evening he talks about every thing you can think of, and it is worth a thousand lectures to hear him, besides being much more amusing than a lecture. I never knew a man so bright-spirited; it is quite delightful to hear him laugh; and you would scarcely think there was so much wisdom in what he says, if you were not accustomed to his joking way. He is a great favorite here; already various gentlemen in the neighborhood (in the neighbornood means twenty miles of mountains) have offered him shooting; and one, who is going to China, has placed his yacht at his disposal for the whole of September, if he chooses to have it. Now I must say good-bye; for Amy and I are going out to see some of the shooting; and it is time we started.

"Your affectionate daughter,

"VIOLET NORTH.

"P.S.—Mr. Drummond is quite delighted with the gun you sent him; and yesterday he tried it by getting old Peter to throw empty bottles into the air. Mr. Drummond did not hit any of the bottles, however. I could see that it must be a very difficult thing to do."

"Violet! Amy! Come along now, and bring all your waterproofs, cloaks, wrappers, and umbrellas!"

A tall, gaunt figure was standing in the door-way, clad in a rough shooting-jacket, leggings, and thick boots. A much smaller and older man—a curious, little, weather-beaten man—was standing outside, holding in leash a very ragged-looking setter.

"It'll no rain the day," the old man said, abruptly.

"But it is raining," responded Mr. Drummond.

The wiry little man cast a glance around at the gray skies and the still gray sea.

"Na, na," he said, "it'll no rain the day."

"But, confound you, it *is* raining!" cried Drummond. "What do you call that?"

He pointed to the rain-drops formed by the drizzle that had fallen on the well-oiled barrels of his breech-loader.

"Well, and eff the gun iss to come to harm with that," said old Peter, testily, "you will better be for leafing it at home. It iss the gentlemen now that they will tek sich care of their guns ass if the guns wass no for shooting at all. You should hef brought a gun that wass good for this country."

"You will have to clean this gun very carefully, I can tell you, Peter; and every night, too."

"I will not," said the old man, sturdily. "There iss no man will know more apout guns as me; and effery Saturday night, that will do ferry well. It wass Mr. Maclean, of Carn-Sloe, he used to say to the gentlemen at the house, 'Kott, what would we do without ta Sunday effery week? our guns would neffer be cleaned at all But the Sunday, it wass made for other things as the cleaning of guns; and the Saturday night, that will do better for me."

"Then you won't clean my gun every night?"

"There is no use of it."

"Then I must do it myself, I suppose?"

"Ferry well."

The two girls now came down-stairs, fully equipped for the expedition; and the oddly assorted party now set out.

"Is that dog of yours any better behaved, Peter?"

"He's a grand good dog, a ferry good dog," said the old Highlandman. "There iss just nothing that will pass the nose of him. Ay, I will say this, that sometimes he is a something too eager in the rinnin' in—ay, just a wee thing too eager."

"Yes," said Mr. Drummond, "he has no fault at all—beyond a fancy for eating every bird you shoot."

The old man was nettled; but there was a humorous twinkle in his eyes all the same.

"Ay, sir; but even then he will not get too fat when he iss out with you, sir."

"Confound you, Peter, you are more impertinent than ever."

"Na, na, sir; I will only speak the truth to you, ass you will speak it to me; and there is no harm in that."

"I think, Mr. Peter," said a certain tall young lady, with great asperity and dignity—"I think you might speak the truth a little more respectfully."

The old keeper gave a side-glance as he trudged along.

"Ay, I am no in the use of heffing leddies come out to the shooting."

"Peter and I understand each other very well, Violet," Mr. Drummond said. "You will soon learn not to mind wha he says—especially when he reports about the game. I suppose you are quite prepared, Peter, to find the forms of thirty or forty wholly imaginary hares at a moment's notice?"

Peter but half understood the sarcasm.

"There iss plenty of game, if there wass any one to shoot it," said he coolly; and then he added, with another twinkle in his eye, "Did you effer hear, mem, of John MacFarlane, that was sent out by Mr. Maclean, of Carn-Sloe, with the two English gentlemen?"

"No, I never did," said Violet.

"Ay, it iss ferry cleffer some of the English gentlemen are; and they wass coming to see a piece of shooting that Carn-Sloe had to let; and John MacFarlane, he went with them; and Carn-Sloe, he had told John to gif a good account of the ground. And they was asking him, 'John, iss there any pheasants here?' And he will say, 'They're just in soosands;'* for he would get Carn-Sloe a good price. And they wass asking him, 'John, iss there any parrtriches here?' And he will say, 'They're just in soosands.' And one of the English gentleman he wass a cleffer young man; and, for the joke of it, he will ask, 'John, is there many gorillas too? And John, he will see him winking, and he will say, 'No, there iss no many gorillas here; they comes and goes in twos and threes—just like yoursels.' And it wass a ferry good answer to the young man."

By this time they had reached the margin of the shooting, and the tall sportsman was transferring to his pockets some of the cartridges which Peter carried, when suddenly the whole world seemed to grow black around them. They had passed the last signs of cultivation; and the only possible shelter from the impending storm was a wall of rough stones that ran up the valley between two hills. As the first heavy drops were already plashing down, they had to make a race for this dike; Peter following up the retreat with ill-concealed disgust. Here was the mischief of taking ladies out shooting—and on the 12th, too.

The small group successfully crouched under the wall, the driving wind carrying the fierce torrents of rain well over them; while Peter stood out in the open, unconcernedly looking out toward the sea.

"Why, Mull has disappeared altogether!" cried Violet, who was also looking that way.

"Oh yes, they sometimes have a drop of rain in Mull," said Mr. Drummond, contentedly, doubled up like a trussed fowl. "I asked a Mull man last year, in August, what he thought of the Mull weather; and he said, quite complacently, 'It uz verra good weather—ay, verra good weather; there waz a whole week in June we hadna a single drop o' rain; but the weather it uz a little bit broken after the 20th of August.' But do you see Mull now? Isn't that wonderful? And look at Morven!"

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* "Soosands"—thousands.

What strange apparition of a world was this—far behind the rain, and shining in pale yellows and greens? The intermediate veil of a rainy cloud served to show the distant sunlit sea and the hills as something pale, magical, and remote; while the island of Lismore, nearer at hand, began to gleam through a mass of rainbow colors that seemed to lie along the sea for a space of fifteen or twenty miles. This strange and spectral world was full of motion, too—its aspect changing every minute—as the black clouds broke overhead to show bold dashes of white and blue; as the distant sunlight drank up the rain-clouds, and then the great hills came out distant and clear, and all round the splendid coasts of Morven, Mull, and Lorne the rushing blue seas of the Atlantic shone in the light.

This warm burst of sunlight roused the crouching party; and when they stood up they found the beautiful bright day showing the colors of the hills around at their very richest—the clear, shining grays of the rocks, the pink patches of heather, the yellow-greens of the bracken, and the curious blue-greens of the furze, with everywhere to each point of light a sharp black shadow.

"Are ye ready now, sir?" said Peter, impatiently.

"You needn't be in a hurry, Peter; there's nothing to shoot, you know."

Now, these words had scarcely been uttered when an extraordinary circumstance occurred. The party were passing by the side of a small inclosure of young larches planted along the side of the hill; and just at this moment a hare ran out right in front of them.

"Shoot, sir, shoot!" yelled Peter, seeing that the sportsman calmly contemplated the hare, without putting up his gun.

The animal had been so startled by coming unexpectedly on its foes that, for a second, it had remained motionless, staring with large paralyzed gray eyes at them; then the next moment it was off and up the hill like lightning. Peter could not restrain the rage and disappointment that possessed him; he uttered a whole series of ejaculations in Gaelic, and then flung up his hands in despair.

"Did you see her beautiful eyes?" asked Mr. Drummond of Violet.

"Yes, only for a moment."

"Who could put up a gun and bang the head off an animal that was looking at you like that!" he said, absently.

"Uncle, mamma will laugh at you again," said Miss Amy. "Peter is sure to tell her."

"Did you see how she ran?" he asked again, quite unconcernedly. "What a wonderful piece of mechanism! If you could think of speed as an abstraction, and put it in a coat of brown fur, that would be a hare. Well, come on."

"Will I tek home the dog?" asked Peter, in bitter sarcasm.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I thought you wass maybe going up to the loch with the leddies. Or would you rather try the shooting?"

"Try the shooting? If I tickled you under the fifth rib with a charge of number-six shot—and it would serve you right—you wouldn't be so desperately facetious, Peter. Let loose that precious dog of yours. We'll see if we can get him something to eat."

They had now reached a series of heathery and rocky knolls forming a ridge along the side of the mountain; and here the ragged brown setter was set at liberty, to the no small alarm of many small birds which he industriously hunted up as he plunged madly about.

"Have a care, Jack?" Peter called out, in a muttered whisper. "Now, sir, now!"

Mr. Drummond hurried forward, though with a dark suspicion that Jack was drawing him on to a chaffinch or a thrush. The suspicion was wrong, however, for just as Jack, yielding to temptation, suddenly darted his nose into a tuft of heather, there was a wild whir of wings, and a rapid discharge of two barrels.

"Down charge, confound you!" were the last words heard by Jack, as the gallant animal forthwith darted off in joyous pursuit of the bird, which had flown off unharmed.

"That's a nice dog of yours, Peter," remarked Mr. Drummond, when his ancient came up.

"The poor beast thinks the bird maun be got somehow," retorted Peter, with composure.

"How could you miss him!" exclaimed Violet.

"Uncle, he got up under your feet!"

"And he seemed to me to be as big as a peacock."

"You might have hit him with your cap, Mr. Drummond."

The sportsman was not affected by these taunts and jeers.

"Ay, that was just it," he said, seriously. "I fired too soon."

"'Deed, that iss ferry true, sir," interposed Peter. "You fired eight days too soon."

"What do you mean?" said the victim of all this sarcasm, with a stare.

"Did you not see it was a blackcock?"

"Good gracious!"

There was a shout of merciless laughter from the two young ladies, which drew down upon them the remark that if they treated so grave a matter as the 12th of August with levity and ridicule, they had better go on at once to the fresh-water loch and gather lilies. And indeed they resolved to accept this advice; for struggling through the heather was somewhat fatiguing work; and now the sun was shining down with a scorching heat. So, with Amy as a guide, the two young ladies set off up the hill toward a small and lonely mere which was to be the trysting-place for luncheon; while Mr. Drummond and his faithful companion went on their way through the thick heather.

"Ay, we will do ferry much better now," said Peter, with an air of relief. "There iss no shooting at all when the leddies will come out—and the talking—and the talking—"

Out of a bunch of sedges growing in one of the hollows started, with a sudden whir and cry of alarm, a strange gray animal that seemed to fill the air with fire-works and impossible angles; there was a loud bang from one of the barrels: then a confused tumbling of wings as the snipe fell dead on a bit of rock.

"Did I not tell you, sir," said Peter, indignantly, as he rescued the bird from the jaws of Jack, "that there would be no shooting when the leddies wass here with their talking—"

"Confound you, you talk more than a dozen ladies—"

"And you will shoot as well ass any one when you will not mek a joke of it; and it iss not every one will shoot a snipe—"

"What a fool the bird must have been to run against the shot like that," remarked the sportsman, apparently to himself; "if it had only flown straight like another bird, it would be alive now."

On they went again, with the blazing sun scorching face and hands, and not a breath of wind coming in from that wide expanse of blue sea. Jack, moderating his first transports at finding himself free, was working a little better, and the garrulous ancient was for once holding his tongue. But there were no birds.

"Here, sir, here!" shouted Peter, in an excited whisper—"a rabbit!"

"Where?"

He pointed to a tuft of bracken just at his foot, in which the rabbit had taken refuge.

"Be ready, sir."

"Stop a bit," remarked the sportsman, calmly, seeing that the rabbit was determined to remain there until it was kicked out, "I can not take advantage of this poor creature's confidence—"

"Will ye no shoot her?" said the exasperated Peter. "Tam her, I will wring her neck then, and tek her home!"

"Hold hard, you merciless old scoundrel! I am mapping out a radius of forty yards—she shall have that chance for her life—and if she gets beyond that she can do what she likes—call a hansom, or turn round and have a look at us—"

Peter's impatience was too much for him; he would not wait for his master to finish; he kicked out the rabbit. The frightened animal bolted out from the other side of the brackens, ran tilt against Mr. Drummond's feet, and then went straight up the side of the knoll, which was here almost perpendicular. The sportsman looked on in astonishment. He had not thought it worth while to map out the radius in this direction.

"Shoot her, sir! shoot her!" called out Peter, in rage and despair, as the rabbit disappeared over the edge of the rock above their heads.

"I don't like firing at rabbits in the air," observed Mr. Drummond, with much composure. "That rabbit was last seen in Covent Garden—in the opera of 'Der Freischutz;' the preservation of my soul is of more importance than a rabbit-pie. And what would become of you, Peter, if you eat a witch-rabbit, a demoniacal pie, a slice of hideous enchantment—"

"Kott pless me, sir, are we to hef any shooting the day?" exclaimed Peter, observing that the sportsman was quite absently staring out at the sea while he talked—and while Jack, by-the-way, had got about a quarter of a mile ahead.

"Not much, not much," was the reply. "Where are the birds, Peter?"

Indeed there were no birds to be found along these lower ridges of the hills, but Peter would have every inch of the ground gone over before going up to the heights. At last, however, after two hours' fruitless work in the blazing sunlight, they began to ascend, and finally found themselves on the crest of a mountain which seemed to place the whole world at their feet. Even if he had been less fatigued with the climb, the gallant sportsman would have paused in the chase to look at the wonderful panorama now spread out around him.

Which was the more lovely, then—the seaward view, or the landward? The far-stretching arms of the still blue water lay around the soft green islands; the sunlight shone on the white tower of a light-house some dozen miles away; one or two ships, looking like toys, lay becalmed; and away beyond these, over the dazzling brightness of the sea, rose the majestic shoulders and peaks of the Morven hills, grown pale and ethereal in their summer hues. Inland, again, the eye rested on an endless series of mountain ranges—mountain billows they almost seemed to be—decreasing in intensity of color until they appeared as mere clouds at the horizon. Those nearer at hand were mostly of an olive-green color where the sunlight caught their slopes, with here and there a patch of pale purple, telling of a motionless cloud overhead. Which was the more lovely—the blue summer sea, with its low long islands, its white ships, and its faintly colored hills, or this vast and silent world of mountains, close up to the sky?

"Are ye no goin' on, sir?"

Mr. Drummond started, for a human voice sounded strangely in the great stillness.

"All right, Peter."

Again they pushed forward, and it almost seemed as if their bad luck was following them up here also, when Jack suddenly ceased his wild plunges over the moor. He had got into a gentle hollow between a mass of rocks, and appeared convinced that the rusty tufts of heather and the green masses of bracken concealed something mysterious and awful.

Suddenly the absolute silence of the mountain-top was broken by what was nothing less than a wild and general scrimmage. From all parts of the heather, one after another, rose a succession of huge brown masses, that flew this way and that with a noise like the throbbing of a paddle-steamer infinitely quickened; and bang after bang came from the reloaded gun. The dog seemed to be rushing everywhere, with Peter howling oaths in Gaelic at him; the air was filled with sulphurous smoke; the hills were echoing the heavy musketry-fire.

Then there was a pause—an awful silence, and a look of bewilderment on the face of the sportsman. Had he shot any thing? he seemed to ask, after all this terrible commotion.

There was a loud howl from Jack; for Peter—assured that the firing was over, and his life no longer in danger—had rushed at the dog to admonish him with a whip, at the same time getting hold of a bird that was doubtless on the point of being devoured.

"That *is* a nice dog of yours, Peter."

"He iss a ferra good dog whateffer," contended Peter sturdily, as he went to pick up two more birds. "Ass I wass saying afore, there will be nothing will pass the nose of him, and if he iss a little too eager in the rinnin', we can cure him of that. And we will not cure him of that unless you will shoot the birds."

"Are you grumbling still? Haven't I just shot some birds?"

"Three, sir; ay, sir, you hef shot three. But ass for the number of them you hef missed, ay, Kott only knows that."

"By heavens, I have a great mind to shoot *you*, Peter."

"You would miss me, sir," said Peter, imperturbably.

"I don't mean to rob the hangman, anyhow," said his master. "Now put the birds in your bag, and we will go down to the loch."

"Already, sir?" said Peter; but the remonstrance was of no avail, the sportsman proceeding to cross the ridge of the hill until he came in sight of a fresh-water loch, lying in a small hollow far below him.

It was a picturesque little lake that lay there in the cup of the mountains. One half of its surface was hidden by water-lilies, the white stars of the flowers gleaming here and there among the broad green leaves; the other half of the lake showing a perfect mirror of the overhanging hills and sky; with this difference, that whereas the brilliant colors of the sky were faithfully reflected, the spectral mountains that went away down into those blues and whites were of a uniform rich shining brown, as deep in color as a newly cut peat. That, indeed, was the color of the clear, dark water itself, come from the mountain rills.

There was a small boat on the lake, lying motionless; and there were two figures in the boat, one distinguished by a white feather that gleamed in the sun. When the sportsman, high on the mountain-top, sent down his view-halloo, he was answered by a flutter of two handkerchiefs; and presently, as he proceeded to descend the hill, he saw two tiny oars put out, and the boat begin to creep slowly to the shore.

"Now, girls, set to work to get luncheon ready," was the command. "Why, you might have had the hamper opened, and the cloth spread on the grass, and every thing ready, instead of idling out there in a boat. Is this a fit reception for a weary hunter returning from the fatigue of the chase?"

"What spoils has the weary hunter brought back with him?" demanded the elder of the two girls; whereupon she was admonished not to indulge a vain curiosity, but, instead, to put the bottles of beer into the lake to cool. The weary hunter contentedly sat and beheld these and other preparations being made for his comfort.

It was a sufficiently picturesque and enjoyable little meal, up here by the side of the solitary lake, amidst the silence of the hills, in the breathless warmth and brilliancy of a summer day. The discontented Peter and his erratic companion Jack were both seated at some distance off, on a bank of green brackens; and with them was the boy who had brought the basket all the way from Castle Bandbox. In front of the mighty hunter lay the four birds that had been taken forth from the bag for purposes of display. The luncheon itself was distributed in a promiscuous manner over such bits of rock, tufts of heather, and clumps of bracken as were most convenient.

And when a soothing pipe followed the frugal meal, and introduced a new perfume into the warm air, the hunter, with a great look of contentment on his face, began to discourse; and his discourse was of all things in the earth, and in the air, and the sea. First of all, if the report of a faithful listener is to be credited, it treated of the dying-out of metaphoric speech in literature. It pointed out that the whole of Shakspeare is written in that now unknown tongue; it dealt with the substitution of similes for metaphors; it traced the degeneracy of similes into the "allusions" of newspaper articles. And then, harking back upon Shakspeare, it asserted that the greatest good fortune which could befall a certain young lady, then present, was that she might never lose her sense of wonder; that she should never get into the habit of taking the facts and phenomena of the world as matters of course; that always the mystery of life should be before her eyes. What happiness it would be, continued this indolent orator, if one could come fresh to the reading of Shakspeare; if one's familiarity in youth with the existence of Juliet, and Rosalind, and King Lear, and Autolycus, could be absolutely wiped out; if one were introduced with all the sense of novelty and wonder to the magic world of Puck and Ariel, to the mysterious horrors of "Macbeth," and the idyllic quiet of Arden Forest. "By-and-by," remarked the master to his attentive pupil, "you will understand better what I mean when we take you to the lonely shores of Mull and the solitary coasts of Skye; and there you will learn how the ways and doings of humanity, which are the whole world to a dweller in cities, are really but a trifling and temporary accident in the history of that awful world that existed through innumerable ages without a sign of life in its empty seas and its silent lands."

"You ask me sometimes," he then said, apparently addressing Violet, but with his eyes fixed idly on the still waters of the lake, "why I laugh at very serious people who are desperately in earnest about their affairs. Well, I think it was those lonely hills in the West Highlands did that for me. If you only think of it, it seems strange enough, this intense preoccupation, during the brief moment that one calls life—this forgetfulness of why and wherefore, and to what end. The man who has made his eighty thousand is miserable until he makes his ninety thousand; and he works away as if he had a whole series of life-times to fall back upon, instead of one, and that one the most puzzling of all mysteries. Those mountains of Skye, in their awful age, and silence, and desolation—I wonder if they take any notice of the race of little creatures temporarily occupying the surface of the earth—children who take no heed of yesterday or to-morrow: they don't know where they came from; they don't know where they are going; but the present hour is enough for them, and they must be desperately in earnest over their pastimes and occupations; some strumming on drums and making a great noise in the world; others wearing wigs and looking wise; others picking up bits of metal, and anxious only to say, 'My hoard is bigger than yours.' And then, at the end of the day, sleep comes down on the children—the gentle mother Death hushes all that strife of drums and tongues, the quarrelling, and striving, and anxiety—and the mystery of that strange day and its doings remains unsolved. Perhaps the new day will bring more light," he added, after a pause.

"Are ye goin' on, sir?" said Peter, coming up with evident impatience in his face.

"Gracious goodness! this man is as intent on killing birds as if he hadn't a soul to be saved!" exclaimed the indolent sportsman. "Peter, do you know you have a soul to be saved?"

"I ken we hef been here for an hour and more as an hour," said Peter, gloomily.

"You see, he won't answer. He is like that countryman of his who wouldn't tell a cross-examining counsel whether he was a Protestant or a Roman Catholic for fear of committing himself. All that could be got out of him was, 'I tell you, sir, I hef no bias.' And yet it is very curious," he continued, just as if there were no hiatus in his train of thought, "what rich people could do if only they were less in earnest, and tried to amuse themselves. I have often thought that if I were a rich man I should like to stand at Temple Bar with a thousand sovereigns in a bag, and give one to each person who passed, irrespective of his appearance. Mind you, you could confer a great deal of happiness that way; for even those who were themselves rich would feel a comfortable sensation in getting an unexpected sovereign; they would get a little glow of satisfaction, just as if they had drunk a glass of dry sherry before sitting down to dinner—"

"Are ye goin' on, sir?" again asked the impatient Peter.

"Yes, I am goin' on, Peter, but not with the shooting—not at present. Why, your head is as full of the shooting—you remind me of the Highland boatman who took out a celebrated traveler in his boat for an evening's fishing; and when he was asked afterward what he thought of the great man, he said, with great bitterness, 'Ay, hass he traveled much? Well, there iss no appearance of it; for I wass thinking he would speak of killing and fighting the lions and teegers; but it wass nothing but the feshen and the feshen he will speak of, and there wass nothing in his head but the feshen and the feshen, and any one knows about the feshen.' But if we must go, we must. You girls must put back those things in the basket and give it to the boy. Amy, when you have reported yourself at home, go down to John Maclean and tell him we shall want his boat to-night. Take a brace of birds apiece. Good-bye!"

"Any more orders, please, sir?" asked Violet, meekly.

"Go away, and don't be impertinent to people older than yourself," said the sportsman, as he shouldered his gun and set off.

Now that afternoon, whether it was that he considered something due to the 12th, or whether it was that he wished to provide the small household with game sufficient to give him two or three days idleness, Mr. Drummond went seriously and diligently to work; and by dint of firing a great many times, whether the birds rose wild or not, he managed to make a bag which even satisfied Peter. As they walked home, indeed, in the evening, Peter was quite cheerful and loquacious —in his grim fashion, that is to say, for in his most mirthful moments he spoke in a discontented, querulous tone, as if he dared not admit to himself that he had nothing to grumble about. And on this occasion his unwonted levity took the form of telling stories about a relative of his, one John MacFarlane, who was keeper to Mr. Maclean of Carn-Sloe; and the aim of those stories, so far as could be made out, was to show that John MacFarlane was a stupid man who said and did ridiculous things, but that, all the same, John MacFarlane was more than a match for the English, who were more stupid still.

"Ay," said Peter, "there wass a ferry cleffer Englishman, and he will know all about the stones and rocks, and he will say to John, 'John, you belief in your Bible, and you belief that all the people that hef lived in the world will rise again on the last day;' and John he will say, 'Yes, sir, I belief that.' And the Englishman, he will say, 'Now, John, I will tell you something; and it is this, that if the whole world wass made of phosphates, there would not be enough of phosphates to make bones for all those people; and what do you say to that, John?' And John, he will not wait long for his answer: 'Well sir,' this wass what John will say, 'the Bible will tell us that them are dead in the Lord will rise first; and I am sure there will be plenty of phosphates for them; and as for the wicked people, I do not care if they hef not a leg to stand on.' And it wass a ferry good answer to gif to the Englishman."

"It was a very good answer, but it is a very wicked story, Peter."

"There wass another story," continued Peter, with a twinkle in his eye, but the same grumbling tone in his voice, "ferry wicked; but many's the time I will hef a laugh at that story. That wass about two men in a boat, and the night it wass so black they could not find their way into the harbor at all, and the wind it wass blowing ferry hard. And the one he says to the other, 'Duncan, you must gif a prayer now, or we will never get in to the harbor at all.' And Duncan, he says, 'I canna do it; you maun do it yourself, Donald.' And Donald, he will say, 'Tam you, Duncan, if you do not gif a prayer, we will be trooned as sure as death, for I can see nothing but blackness.' And so it wass that Duncan will stay in the stern of the boat, and he will kneel down, and he will say, 'O Lord, it iss fifteen years since I hef asked you for any thing; but it will be another fifteen years before I will ask you for any thing more, if you will tek the boat into the harbor.' And then, sure enough, at this moment there wass a great sound of the boat going on the beach, and Donald, that was up at the bow, he will cry out, 'Stop, Duncan, do not pray any more; do not be beholden to any body, bekass the boat's ashore already.'"

"It seems to me, Peter," said his companion, slowly, "that there is a great deal of latent villainy about you."

"What, sir?"

"You are a jiber and a jeerer at solemn things."

"Indeed I am not, sir," said Peter, indignantly. "A story iss only a story, and you will get a laugh from it; and the man who iss afrait of a story iss a foolish man, whether he iss an Englishman or whether he iss not an Englishman."

"In my country they don't understand joking about such things, Peter."

"Kott pless me, sir, in your country I am not sure that they will understand any thing," said Peter, coolly.

This general proposition Peter proceeded to justify by quoting instances of extraordinary ignorance on the part of English people whom he had met—people who did not know the difference between a sea-trout and a grilse, who called a loch a lock, and wore kid gloves when they went out shooting. Mr. Drummond listened with great patience and in silence, apparently deeply ashamed of his country and country-men.

And now, as they trudged along the solitary road, they got down into the valleys; and though there was a wooded hill on their left that shut off the sea, they saw by the great blaze of crimson over the dark line of the trees that the sun was setting in the west; while in the wide and silent hollow before them, over the cold greens of the marsh, a pale white mist was beginning to gather. Suddenly, however, they got out of this pale and cold valley, and were confronted by all the bewildering colors of the sunset over the sea. Along the western skies lay a sultry and dusky redness—a confused mist of colored light; and the mountains of Mull and of Morven, rising into it, were of a beautiful reddish-purple, and seemingly transparent. Out there the long green islands were growing dark over the silver-gray of the sea—a silver gray broken by olive-green splashes as the water lapped round the rocks; but farther out still the sea was a smooth plain of crimson, bewildering to the eye, and causing one long neck of land to look as black as jet. They were in the land of gorgeous sunsets; and the stranger had not as yet become familiar with such splendid exhibitions of color. It was with a dumb regret that he had to turn away from the shore again, and take to the hills, though now the warm red light was shining across the slopes of heather and bracken. The small white house on the high knoll gave him a kindly welcome. A pair of swallows were flying about the gables. A tiny terrier wagged her tail as he approached. There was a scent of meadow-sweet in the evening air.

Three brace of grouse, three hares, a rabbit, a brace of snipe, a blackcock (shot by misadventure, and carefully hidden away at the foot of the game-bag by the unscrupulous Peter), and a landrail—this was the spoil which the mighty hunter had brought home, and which he stoutly contended was all that a man could get off that piece of ground in a single day. Nevertheless, there was a fierce war of words during that evening meal at Castle Bandbox; and proposals to call in Peter to give testimony as to the number of misses. The hunter treated these suspicions with scorn.

Greater peace prevailed when the small household came out again into the cool evening—indeed, they were struck silent by the transformation that had come over the world. All round the horizon the great mountains were black as night; over them was the smooth and lambent expanse of the sky, with the full orb of the moon glowing in its mellow light; far away, in the east, over the black range of the hills, a planet burned clear in the blue. Then the moonlight fell on the furze and brackens near them, touching them with a soft gray; while along the slopes of the mountains behind them, where there were strips of cultivated land, it lighted up those small patches of corn almost to a silver whiteness among the ebony-black shadows of the overhanging rocks. There was not a cloud in the clear, dark heavens, nor a murmur from the far expanse of the sea.

They went away down to the shore, and got out a small rowing-boat, and rowed away from the land. It was the two girls who pulled; and the sound of the oars was the only sound to be heard in the stillness of the night; for even a certain loquacious philosopher did not choose to break the mystic silence that reigned over the world. The rocky shores they had left behind became blacker and blacker; the points of orange fire that told of distant cottages became smaller and smaller; the white moonlight glittered on the wet blades of the oars. Mull and Morvan were awful in their gloom, where the great mountains seemed to be alone with the stars.

"What a dreadful thing it would be," Violet said, letting her oar rest for a minute, "to go up one of those mountains at night, all by yourself; you would imagine every sound was something horrible—"

"Now, Violet, that is all founded on a common mistake," said another voice. "Just think what you would do if you were a ghost. You wouldn't go away into lonely places, where you could see nothing, of a cold night, and prowl about there. Wouldn't you rather take a nice warm forenoon, and sit invisible on a stile, and see the country-folks drive by to market in the brisk sunshine? I do believe that ghosts are friendly fellows, and wouldn't frighten you for the world. Often, when I am passing a wood, I wonder whether any of them are sitting on the fence, having a quiet hobnob among themselves, and perhaps laughing at the way you walk. Of course, if ghosts should plague people by appearing at night, they ought always to plague rich people. The night is the day of the poor; then they have every thing redressed and made right in their dreams. A rich man in actual life can't enjoy himself half so much as a poor man who dreams he is rich, or a neglected man who dreams he is famous, or a sickly man who dreams he is an athlete. But do you know who must have the happiest dreams in the world?"

Nobody did know.

"A dog. They are full of life and motion, without remorse. And were you ever asked a conundrum in a dream, the answer to which it cost you a desperate effort to make out; although of course the one side of your brain that made the conundrum must have known the answer all along? In going to sleep, too, haven't you had a clear and delightful consciousness that your perceptions and fancies were growing quite the reverse of clear—the confusion meaning the approach of the sleep you are waiting for? Then there is another— Gracious goodness! what's that?"

He had been interrupted by a loud splash, apparently proceeding from a rock some forty or fifty yards off.

"It must have been a seal," said he; and thereupon he began to tell his companions an exciting story of an elderly and near-sighted gentleman who came back to his hotel one day complaining that he had fired three bullets at a seal, but missed him each time; and of a negro who came running in to declare, in wrath and indignation, that, while bathing, he had been fired at three times from the shore, and had his ear cut off. Every body knew that that true legend was about three minutes old.

By-and-by they set off again for the shore, and when they had put up Mr. Maclean's boat, they proceeded to walk away up into the hills, where the moonlight was shining coldly on the stone walls, the furze bushes, and the scattered patches of corn. The voices of two young girls broke the silence of the night, singing an old school-song they had often sung together. Then they bid farewell to the magic world of moonlit sea, and mountains, and sky; and a peaceful, beautiful, and memorable day came to a welcome end. If one's life could all be made up of such!

CHAPTER XIX.

ABRA.

So the brisk, bright days and weeks went by; and the ceaseless round of activities in the open air—whether the blue seas lay shining in the light, or the fierce south-west winds sent the foam flying high over the rocks—brought glad health and happiness to this little band of strangers, and plenty of sun-brown to their faces. Violet had by this time quite simply and naturally fallen into her position in the household. She felt so thoroughly at home that she never thought of the time when she had been only a visitor; and to her friends it seemed as though she had always been with them. She would have been well content—as she frankly told Mrs. Warrener one evening—to spend the rest of her life with them up here in this Highland cottage.

A woman can not occupy a place in a household without having some sort of occupation; and it was almost insensibly that Miss Violet, while helping Mrs. Warrener in certain things, managed to create a new series of duties for herself. These had for their open and and ostensible object the greater care and comfort of that somewhat shy potentate who presided over this household of women; and it is probable that any other man than himself would have been embarrassed by these attentions. He accepted them, however, as a matter of course, which greatly pleased the giver of them, who never felt so proud and glad as when he asked her to do something for him—not in the language in which one would beg a favor from a visitor, but in a much more curt and familiar way. So it came about that no one thought of interfering with Miss Violet in her self-imposed duties, which were performed with a scrupulous care and accuracy. When Mr. Drummond came down of a morning, he never noticed that his slippers were invariably in the same spot; that his table-napkin was never missing; that the newspaper which had arrived by post was carefully opened, cut, folded, and placed beside his plate. His shooting-boots and leggings were always at hand the moment he wanted them; his gun—which seemed to keep marvelously clean, although Peter absolutely declined to polish it every day—awaited him in the corner; there were always the proper number of cartridges in the bag. Nay, she had succeeded so far in becoming his henchman that, after having assisted him on several occasions in measuring out powder and shot for the cartridges, she had made bold to make the cartridges herself, out and out, and never were cartridges more accurately constructed. She kept a game book: but she refused to compare the number of cartridges she made with the number of entries in that small volume. His pocket-flask was always mysteriously full; she invariably prepared the luncheon-bag; on the fine days she and Amy would walk out to meet him—and he could recognize the proud and graceful carriage of the girl a mile off—and on the wet days she had dry socks and slippers awaiting him. No matter what he wanted, it seemed to be always just by; and he did not know what pleasure he gave her in falling into the habit of invariably turning to her with a "Violet, I wish you would do this;" or "Violet, I wish you would do that."

Mrs. Warrener was amused; but ventured to remonstrate.

"Violet, do you know that you are becoming James's slave?"

The girl flushed for a second; but, all the same, she said, with a smile,

"I don't care, so long as I have so good a master."

As for him, he seemed to take her presence in the house as a matter of course; and made fun of her, or lectured her, or teased her, with an absolute freedom of intimacy and friendliness. And yet there were one or two subtle distinctions between his treatment of her and his treatment of her companions which she did not fail to notice. In walking about the mountain-paths in the evening, he was in the habit of taking the hand of his companion; but he never took Violet's hand. When he was impressing some profound moral truth, in enigmatical language, upon his sister or his niece, he frequently put his hand on the shoulder of the patient listener to enforce his precepts; he never put his hand on Violet's shoulder. Sometimes, indeed, he seemed to recall to himself that she was a guest in the house, and ought to be treated with a special kindness and respect, rather than with an easy familiarity, and thereupon he would make some essay in that direction. He did not know how these efforts, at once perceived by the quick sensitiveness of the girl, wounded her to the heart; so that, instead of being pleased by his gentle courtesy, she was like to have gone away to her own room, and burst into tears over what seemed a rupture of the old and friendly relations between the master and his slave.

But although she was hurt when he endeavored to treat her with respectful consideration, she, on the other hand, was fierce enough if any one failed to show sufficient respect for him. If a boatman, encouraged by the jocular freedom of Drummond's manner and speech, became in the faintest degree familiar, he received a reminder there and then which he was not likely to forget. She had completely overawed old Peter; who was at first sulky, then betrayed a sort of grumbling admiration of her courage; and finally said she was a fine lass, and must have something better than English blood in her veins. Indeed, she seemed inclined to check overfamiliarity on the part of Mr Drummond's own sister and niece. The master of the house was the master of the house.

One evening he had just got home from the shooting, and had been stopped at the door by his sister, who had called attention to the singular light shining across the sea. The sky was covered over with thick purple masses of thunderous clouds—almost black they were, indeed, except where one bold slit showed a glimpse of the high sunny green of the sunset; while underneath this heavy and ominous sky a great flood of yellow light came over from the west, causing the masts of one or two yachts to gleam like silver against the black clouds.

"Why, here comes Violet up the road! She has been down persuading Mr. Morrison to give us a piece of beef for tomorrow. He won't listen to any body but her. If it wasn't for her, we should have nothing but mutton from one week's end to the other."

The girl was coming along the valley at a good pace.

"Do you know," said Mr. Drummond, rather absently, "that it is a happiness to me—a positive delight—merely to see that girl walk? The proud gracefulness of her figure, the freedom of her step—it gives one a sense of her having perfect symmetry of form and splendid health—"

"I don't know what we shall do without her, now we have got so well accustomed to her," said his sister, ruefully.

"Ah, yes, of course," he said, with an effort to look brisk and matter-of-fact; "of course she will go; that is but natural—the young bird flies from its nest as soon as it has wings. Well, Violet has made our little place brighter since she has been with us."

His sister stood silent for a moment.

"I declare," she said, "I can not make up my mind about that young man. Sometimes I like him; sometimes I hate him. If we could only look ahead a few years, we should know better what to do—"

"You forget, Sarah," said her brother, somewhat stiffly, "that neither you nor I have anything to do with that matter. Why should you talk as if you were responsible? The girl is old enough to judge for herself."

"If you loved Violet as I do, you would be more anxious," said Mrs. Warrener, with a sigh; for she could not understand how her brother, ordinarily so solicitous about the welfare of every one around him, should betray an absolute indifference as to such an important question as Violet North's marriage.

The conversation was in any case broken up by the girl herself, who came up through the steep little garden with a fine flush of color in her face, and with gladness in her dark eyes. She was glad to have secured the piece of beef; glad to have escaped the rain; glad to have Mr. Drummond's game-bag to explore. These were sufficient reasons for the bright look on her face: but, indeed Mrs. Warrener had remarked, ever since their arrival in these Highlands, that no especial cause was needed to bring that happy light into Violet North's eyes which now always dwelt there.

"Now, Violet," she said putting the girl's hand within her arm, and taking her off for a little walk round the plateau (Mr. Drummond having gone into the house), "I have a secret to tell you. That is, we thought of keeping it a secret—to give you a surprise; but perhaps it is fairer I should tell you. Mr. Miller arrives to-morrow evening."

Violet stopped suddenly, and unconsciously withdrew her hand from her friend's arm.

"Why should that be a surprise—or a secret—for me?" she asked, coldly.

Mrs. Warrener smiled in her gentle way: the pretence of indifference on the part of those girls about their lovers was charming.

"I thought he was a friend of yours, Violet," she said, with demure sarcasm.

"I hope it is as a friend of your own that you have asked him to your house," responded the girl. "I should have said that we were happy enough without him."

This was a little too much.

"Do you mean to say, Violet, you will not be pleased to see him?" her friend asked; but the question was hardly a serious one.

"Of course I shall be glad to see him—as I should be to see any other friend," answered Miss Violet, with the same proud indifference. "But—but I thought we were comfortable enough without visitors—and I hope it is not on my account that you have asked Mr. Miller to come here."

Her cheeks began to turn red, and it was clear that affectation of indifference was rapidly going.

"I scarcely think it is fair," she was beginning to say, in quicker accents, when Mrs. Warrener gently stopped her.

"Don't be vexed, Violet. Of course, a girl does not like to have her private feelings known, or even guessed at, where a gentleman is concerned; and I must tell you at once that Mr. Miller would have come to see us whether you had been here or not. He was asked to come a long time ago. He is very fond of shooting and yachting; but as there was no shooting worth speaking of, James thought he had better wait till now, and go with us in the *Sea-Pyot*—"

"Oh, *he* is going, is he?" said Violet, quickly.

"Yes; so I believe. You know there is plenty of room in that big boat."

Nothing more was said at the moment. Violet made some excuse, and went in-doors. There she got hold of Amy Warrener, and asked that young lady to come into her room for a minute. She shut the door, and sat down.

"It's all over now," she said.

"What is all over now, Violet?"

Her hands were folded in her lap; her eyes fixed idly on them. "All the pleasant time we have been spending up here: it seems a long time, and yet it has passed quickly. Good-bye to it; I shall never forget it—never!"

"What do you mean, Violet?"

"A stranger is coming to-morrow, and everything will be different."

"A stranger! Do you call Mr. Miller a stranger?"

"Oh, you knew about it, too?" said Miss Violet, raising her eyes quickly. "Why was it all kept secret from me?"

"Why?" said the younger girl, with some embarrassment. "I suppose mamma fancied you would not care to have such things spoken about."

"What things?" she demanded, almost fiercely.

Her young companion was gentle enough; but even she could be goaded.

"You know quite well you are engaged to him, Violet; and what is the use of making a mystery about it?" she said, sharply.

"I know quite well I am nothing of the sort; I know quite well I shall never be engaged to him—never!" said the girl, vehemently. "Engaged to him? I wish he was dead!"

"Oh, Violet!"

"Well, I don't exactly wish that," she said, with some compunction, "but I really cannot bear to have it supposed we are engaged, or likely to be; and what will his coming here do but make discomfort and misery? Haven't we been happy enough by ourselves?—we don't want any body else. And then it appears he is to go with us in the *Sea-Pyot.* Well, if he goes in the *Sea-Pyot,* I know somebody who won't; and the initials of her name, as the Irishman said, are Violet North."

This was uttered with considerable decision. Now, Amy Warrener, young as she was, had a good deal of her mother's shrewd and quiet common sense; and instead of fighting this determination by any argument or appeal, she only said,

"It won't look very friendly, Violet, if you alone refuse to go with us; and Mr. Miller, as a stranger and visitor, is entitled to whatever courtesy we can show him. It isn't his fault it you don't like him. Then, you didn't always appear to dislike him so much—I thought it was quite the other way at one time: and now if you treat him badly, he will think you are only acting the coquette, and wanting to show your independence.'

"I don't care what he thinks," she said, with her cheeks hot, but looking down.

"Others will think the same."

"Who?" And again she looked up with a quick surprise and inquiry in her glance.

"All of us."

"You—will—all—think—that—I—am—a—coquette," she said, slowly.

"Well," said her friend, doubtfully, "you know you encouraged him a great deal."

"And to save myself from that reproach," she continued, quite as slowly and thoughtfully, "to keep your good opinion, I must marry Mr. George Miller?"

There was no answer to that question.

CHAPTER XX.

SETTING OUT.

Mr. George Miller arrived in due course; and very handsome the young fellow looked, as he stepped ashore from the steamer to shake hands with his friends on the quay. Violet had been persuaded to accompany the others; and she could not help greeting him with a pleasant smile; indeed, there was something in this sudden meeting that recalled other days. With great prudence, too, he forbore to express any special pleasure in seeing her again. She was only one of the little group of friends. He addressed himself almost exclusively to Mrs. Warrener, as they proceeded to find their way up to Castle Bandbox.

Nor, on this first evening, were any of Violet's predictions fulfilled. All the happy old time had not completely gone, They were quite as joyous and homely as ever; and a certain discursive orator had as large a share of that talk which could only by courtesy be called conversation; that is, nobody else had a share. Mr. Miller laughed and enjoyed himself with the rest; he did not embarrass Violet with the least specialty of attention; his whole interest was apparently absorbed in his chances of getting a shot or two before starting in the yacht, and in the prospects held out by the *Sea-Pyot* of a comfortable voyage. All was so far well.

It was only by degrees, and that almost imperceptibly, that his influence in this small household began to tell. He was a young man of system, of minute observation, of careful, business-like provision, and could not understand at all the happy-go-lucky carelessness which marked most of Mr. Drummond's arrangements. With him a nine-o'clock breakfast meant a nine-o'clock breakfast; not a breakfast at ten, or half-past nine, or a quarter-past eight, as chance might dictate. For the first time his friends perceived that the pattern of the wall-paper was rather ludicrous, and that a defect in the frame-work of the window produced a draught. They were ashamed to confess they could not tell him whether the local whisky was under or over proof; indeed, none of them knew exactly what proof meant. There was now no vague loitering on the hills for the contemplation of landscape, nor needless waste of time over luncheon: the ground that had to be got over was got over in a proper fashion. Moreover, there was much less missing now. The young man showed himself an excellent shot, and there was no amount of fatigue or discomfort which he would indolently shirk if he believed there was a chance of getting a single bird. Old Peter had enough of it now: he was pretty nearly walked off his legs by this new pupil; while his former pupil ignominiously gave up the chase, lighted a pipe, stretched himself on the heather, where he could command a view of Morven, Mull, and Lismore, and told his companions to come back that way for him when they chose.

Moreover, the incorrigible carelessness of the head of the house became all the more apparent, for his accoutrements now lacked much of Violet's superintendence. She had been accustomed to come down early—before any of the others—to look after his cartridge-bag, his boots, leggings, and what not; but now she never appeared till breakfast was announced, and then she invariably came down-stairs with Amy. They generally found Mr. Miller impatiently pacing up and down in front of the house, and looking at his watch every third minute.

They had beautiful moonlight nights at this time; and they were accustomed to go out for a stroll after dinner, either up into the black hills, where the wan and mystic light was palely shining on the furze and rocks, or down to the shore, where the long, monotonous rush of the waves on the coast alone disturbed the profound and mysterious silence. Here, too, there was a great difference. The party was broken somehow. Violet resolutely and invariably walked with Amy Warrener, chatting, when they did chat, about school-girl themes; Mrs. Warrener generally stayed with them; Mr. Drummond and his guest led the way, the latter giving all the latest information about big-company swindles, stock-exchange transaction the cooking at the Judæum, and so forth.

"Why do you never talk to Mr. Miller, Violet?" Amy Warrener asked one night.

"I don't understand politics; and I don't care about commercial matters," replied the young lady, evasively.

"I don't mean that at all," her friend said. "Why do you scarcely ever address a word to him, even at dinner?"

"Good little girls should be seen, and not heard. I speak when I am spoken to," was the reply.

It was very clear that Violet did not at all care for the presence of Mr. Miller in Castle Bandbox. She seemed restrained and dispirited. A sort of indefinite apprehension appeared to hang over her, which Mrs. Warrener did not fail to notice.

Now, Mr. Miller, from the moment of his arrival in the Highlands, had been most considerate to the girl, and, whatever he might judge to be her feelings toward him, he had not sought to intrude himself upon her in the slightest degree. But, after all, a young man is but a young man; and he grew to think that, considering their past and present relations, she was dealing very harshly with him in so obviously and systematically avoiding any private conversation with him. His difficulty was to find an opportunity of speaking with her alone; and it almost appeared as if she recognized the fact, and was determined to outwit him.

At last he caught her. She had inconsiderately ventured down to breakfast without her ordinary companion, under the impression that Mrs. Warrener had preceded her. When she opened the door of the room and saw Mr. Miller there alone, she would have retreated, but it was too late.

"Violet," said he, "I want to speak to you for a second."

She knew what was coming: she advanced into the room, outwardly calm, but inwardly full of dread. She was vaguely aware that his face was pale.

"Have I offended you?"

"No."

She spoke in so low a voice that he could hardly hear.

"Why do you avoid me so? Why won't you speak to me?"

She did not answer.

"I am sure I have not persecuted you, ever since you seemed to wish to be left free. Haven't I done every thing you could wish?"

"Yes, you have," she answered, with a trifle more emphasis.

"Then why do you treat me as if I were an enemy—as if you were afraid of me?"

"Oh, I hope I don't do that," she said; but her eyes were still fixed on the ground.

For a second or two she stood irresolute, and then she seemed to summon up her courage to speak frankly.

"And if I am afraid of you, in however slight a degree," she said, in clear, low tones, "I have myself to blame. I am deeply to blame—I know that. I—I wish I had never seen you, nor you me; that would have been better for both of us."

"No, no, Violet," he said, kindly, and he came a step nearer; "that is what every girl says—natural timidity, you know: she doesn't know what is before her, and is afraid.

For my part, I am very glad we have met, whatever comes of it; and if you would only give me a chance, I should soon cure your mind of all that apprehension. But how can I do that if you always avoid me? Don't you think it is hardly fair? Would you treat any other friend of yours like that?"

"Oh, if I were only sure," she said, with a sort of despairing earnestness, "that we were friends, and only friends, how glad I should be to do all you wish! Believe that of me, anyway. If you would only let me think that—if you were satisfied with that—I should be so grateful to you! Will you?"

She was looking at him now, with her eyes full of entreaty. He, on the other hand, appeared to be wholly astounded.

"Violet," said he, slowly, "you have hinted this once or twice before. Do you really mean it? Do you wish me to abandon all hope of our being any thing to each other?"

It was precisely what she did wish; but there was a reproach in his tone which she felt keenly; and for the sake of old times she could not bring herself to wound him too cruelly.

"No, not altogether," she said, quickly. "We need not become strangers; we might always remain friends. If I could only persuade you not to think of any thing else!"

He was deeply mortified, of course; and yet he could not quite believe her. Her liking for him had been declared years ago. There was no obstacle, that he could see, to the marriage. He had not even a rival.

At this moment steps were heard on the stairs. He seized her hand for a second, and said, rapidly,

"Don't make this final, Violet. There is some misunderstanding. You must let me hope."

She did not answer as she left the room; but there was that in her face that rendered him somewhat uneasy. Was it true, then, that her aversion from all thought of marriage with him was something more than mere girlish timidity? Was it true that she really wished him to abandon all hope of securing her for his wife?

He put on his cap and went out into the fresh morning air; he wished to be alone for a few minutes, for there was something about all this that he could not well understand. Again and again, as he walked up and down the bit of gravel, he tried to account for Violet's change of feeling toward him—or, at least, for her change of intention; and he could see no reasonable explanation. At this moment he heard Mr. Drummond inside calling "Violet! Violet!" A wild fancy struck him.

Was it true that he had no rival? Could it be possible that the girl had let her declared admiration—her worship, almost—of this man of eight-and-thirty run into a more passionate feeling? The mere suspicion sent a flash of fire tingling through his heart; and he found himself rapidly running over a series of incidents, unnoticed at the time, which now appeared to give at least plausibility to this random conjecture.

In the most commonplace of natures there is always enough of imagination to fan the fires of jealousy. The relations existing between Mr. Drummond and his girlish pupil now assumed a wholly different complexion. In his first flush of anger and surprise and envy, the young man was ready to accuse his friend of having inveigled Sir Acton North's daughter into his house that he might marry an heiress.

But, after all, Mr. Miller was a sensible and prudent young fellow. He reasoned with himself. Was it likely that this gay-hearted, handsome girl, rejoicing in all the boundless hopes and activities of youth, should give away her life to a moping, dreaming, middle-aged man, who had just enough money to keep a moderately decent coat on his back? She was very fond of him—as his niece was. She had a profound admiration for him—as his sister had. Mr. Miller reasoned himself out of his first glow of belief and anger; but he went in to breakfast in a somewhat sullen and suspicious mood.

Now, indeed, the smallest trifles were magnified in the young man's alarmed imagination. He noticed how she brought the newspaper and placed it beside a certain cup. He felt sure that she had been out to bring in the fresh bell-heather, ferns, marigolds, and fuchsias for the table. When all had sat down to breakfast, he observed that Mr. Drummond addressed most of his chance remarks to her; and that she invariably looked up with a bright glance of gratitude when he did so.

A sufficiently trifling incident occurred. Mr. Drummond, like most rather shy and sensitive folks, had a nervous dislike to being watched by furtive glances, especially at meal-times. He would infinitely have preferred to go without mustard, or butter, or any thing of that sort, rather than be reminded that some one was continually observing his plate. Now, on this occasion he happened to look up, and finding his sister's eyes fixed curiously on him, he called out,

"On my solemn word of honor, Sarah, I am only going to eat an egg. Is there any thing awful in that?"

His sister looked shocked and offended; whereupon he continued, in a great good-humor,

"I declare that there is in the world only one human being with whom it is comfortable to have breakfast—who leaves you alone to struggle with your fish-bones—who never turns her eyes upon you except when she speaks to you: who is it? Do you all give it up?"

"It is Violet, of course, uncle," said Amy Warrener, with a laugh. "Violet is always right."

Now surely there was not much in complimenting a girl for minding her own plate at a breakfast-table; but, all the same, the young man looked upon the innocent exclamation of Violet's school-fellow as only confirming some of his gloomiest suspicions. But he would observe still before speaking or acting.

Meanwhile there was a great bustle convulsing the ordinary quiet of Castle Bandbox, in the midst of which no one had time to notice how Violet treated her former lover. Every one was preparing for the approaching voyage in the *Sea-Pyot;* Mr. Drummond making the wildest suggestions about potted meats, condensed milk, and baskets of soda-water; Mrs. Warrener making more sober calculations about the necessary stores for a week's cruise; the girls anxious about water-proofs and thick shoes; and Mr. George Miller, with great care and accuracy of method, getting his fishing-tackle into order. They knew they were about to play at keeping house, just like so many children; and every one pretended to know a vast deal about those very things, which, in serious living on land, they had treated with indifference.

The *Sea-Pyot*, which they could now distinguish lying at her moorings in the bay, was a yawl of some thirty-two tons register and about fifty tons yacht measurement; but she was an exceedingly roomy and comfortable vessel, considering her size. She had a fairly commodious ladies' cabin, a couple of state-rooms for single gentlemen, and a spacious saloon—no less than twelve feet six inches in beam. For the rest, she was anything but a quick sailer with light winds; but she could stand a thoroughly stiff breeze with absolute safety, and then she could do her nine or ten knots an hour. She was worked by four men and a lad, the latter officiating as cook and steward.

It was universally resolved that, as Miss Violet was the most experienced voyager of the party, she should go on board and overhaul the table-linen, locker accommodation, bedding, permanent stores and the like; and this commission was gladly accepted, while stipulating that the others should accompany her. It was with the eager excitement of a party of discovery that they entered the gig which had been sent on shore for them, and were pulled out to the yacht. The skipper—a handsome, good-humored-looking man of thirty-five or so, with a sun-tanned face and a light-yellow beard, who was an old friend and ally of Mr. Drummond's—received them with much ceremonious dignity at the gangway, and, in showing them over his ship, seemed particularly anxious to gratify the tall young lady, who was continually asking him abrupt and business-like questions. She was graciously pleased to express her approval of the whiteness of the decks, the spaciousness of the saloon, and the painting of the sky-lights, but she was of opinion that the small state-room next the forecastle ought to have been a pantry, and she gently but firmly remonstrated with Captain Jimmy for not having a swinging-table in the lower cabin.

"That is true, mem," said the yellow-bearded skipper, with just a trace of Highland accent, "I hef often said that to Mr. Sinclair, and it will only cost five pounds the more."

"Come, Violet, it isn't fair to look a gift horse in the mouth. You ought to be sufficiently grateful to Mr. Sinclair," said Mr. Drummond.

"So I am," she said, doubtfully; "but suppose she is lying well over from the wind, how are we to get any thing to eat and drink?"

"Hold on to your glass, and make the plates steady each other."

"Then suppose we are beating up to windward, every time she is put about every thing will go flying across to the other side."

"Well, the other people on the other side can catch them."

"In their lap?"

"Why not?"

However, there were no great fears on that score, and the party returned home, only regretting that a night must intervene before starting. A great joy of expectation, indeed, prevailed through Castle Bandbox that evening, for the talk was all of the wonderful places they would see, and of the wonderful adventures they would meet, and no one had any suspicion they were taking a Jonah on board.

CHAPTER XXI.

"RAIN, WIND, AND SPEED."

FIERCE and glad was the weather in which the *Sea-Pyot* spread out her great white wings and prepared for her northward flight. From over the tumbling Atlantic came varying gusts and squalls; the main-boom swung this way and that, and the loud flapping of the sails drowned the clanking of the windlass; rushing by went the huge green waves to the shore; and the hurrying clouds, as they came sweeping over from the sea—causing the islands to disappear, and re-appear, and disappear again—sent sudden showers across the vessel's decks, and made the voyagers tighten up still farther the necks of their water-proofs. Above and below the same confusion and bustle prevailed: nobody knew whether the fresh butter had been called for and brought aboard; excited questions were asked about the joints hung at the stern; and the voice of one tall person was heard declaring, in the most solemn language, that he would blow up the powder-magazine, destroy the bulkheads, and lash the taffrail to the top-gallant-mast, if somebody did not help him to stow away the bottled beer. Then there was a sudden cessation of noise overhead. Gradually the saloon tilted over, and there was a muffled sound as of rushing water outside. When the person who had been stowing away the beer put his head, which was adorned by a huge sou'-wester, up the companion-way and looked around, behold! the *Sea-Pyot* was running gallantly out to sea, the tack of her mainsail still hauled up, and Captain Jimmy, with the rain running down his ruddy face, observed to a young lady who stood beside him that he could not as yet relinquish to her the tiller.

"This is a nice sort of day to start in!" observed a young man, who was gloomily trying to keep the rain from getting inside the neck of his water-proof.

"What better could you wish for?" she answered, with a bright laugh. "How fast is she going, Captain Jimmy?"

The skipper glanced at the water running by.

"About echt knots, I think; but we'll get a bit more wind by-and-by, when we get round Lismore."

"Couldn't you let us have the topsail up?" she asked, throwing a critical glance upward.

A shrewd, cautious smile appeared on Captain Jimmy's face.

"She'll go ferry well without the topsail in a little while; and it iss better not to be too eager. You will get plenty of sailing when we will be going up the Sound."

And indeed there was a good deal of sailing when once they had got round the light-house of Lismore and were beating up the Sound of Mull. A heavy sea was rolling down the Sound; the wind freshened further until it dipped the bulwarks of the *Sea-Pyot* in the rushing waves; and the voyagers, sitting on deck-stools up to the windward, had to hold on by such objects as were handy to prevent their suddenly rolling down the slippery decks. Where were the mighty mountains of Mull and of Morven that they had gazed at from afar on many a still summer morning? The voyagers were close to them—running up the channel that divides them, in fact—but all that could be seen were but dim and vague shadows behind the cold gray curtains of the mist. Water and sky seemed one; the gusts of wind were also gusts of rain; the sea-swallows that flashed about, dipping, darting, and uttering shrill cries, seemed but as ghosts in the aqueous vapor. And yet the voyagers appeared so little disconcerted by the weather they were encountering that their mirth grew wilder as the wind blew more fiercely; and the seas that came thundering on the bows of the yacht, and sending showers of spray right over the crouching figures, were only met by derisive shouts of laughter. Only one of these figures remained silent and sullen. Mr. George Miller did not seem to enter much into the sport. It was the private notion of at least one of his companions that the plunging of the *Sea-Pyot* among the waves was rendering the young man uncomfortable; but such was not the fact. Neither the motion of the vessel, nor the fierce rain, nor the numbing position in which he was compelled to sit, was responsible for the preoccupation of Violet's suitor. He had, indeed, other things to think about.

Yet surely, on board a yacht, in such weather, there could be little to increase his suspicions. It is true that both Mr. Drummond and Violet were obviously enjoying themselves; that generally Mr. Drummond addressed to her his profound impressions of life on board the *Sea-Pyot;* and that, indeed, both of them seemed bent on amusing themselves just as if they were a couple of children. And then, when Violet went below to see that the lad Duncan was properly laying the cloth for luncheon, and to assist him in ferreting out the secrets of the lockers, no one volunteered to help her but Mr. Drummond, simply because he had stowed most of the things away, and that in a fashion which no one else could understand.

That luncheon was rather a desperate business—as Miss Violet had predicted on her round of inspection. They were beating up the Sound, with a short starboard tack and a long larboard tack; and as the latter offered more continued quiet, while the vessel did not heel over quite so much, it was resolved that they should drop below as soon as the *Sea-Pyot* had her larboard tack aboard. Mr. Miller would remain on deck—he was not hungry. And very soon he heard, through the sky-light of the saloon, amazing shouts of despair and shrieks of laughter, with now and again an ominous jingle of falling plates and spoons. In fact, the scene below was at first nothing but a wild scramble; for no sooner had the plates been got out from the locker and spread on the table than they immediately began to slide down to leeward, a stately procession which was joined by the ham, by a cold pie, and two decanters. Of course, there was a wild clutching at this object and that, all being secured except the cruet-stand, which had outstripped its companions in the race, and flung itself headlong—mustard, vinegar, and all—into Miss Amy's lap, who was not prepared for the charge, for she was clinging on to the bread-plate. When she had wrathfully retired to change her clothes, and come back again to resume her place, order had been restored by a skillful arrangement of objects, and luncheon was allowed to proceed.

Alas! the time lost could not be recovered; and just as they were beginning to consider that life on board a yacht had its compensations, there was an ominous call above, "Ready about!" The yacht seemed to right herself; the table resumed its natural level.

"They are putting her about," observed Violet, who had picked up some slight knowledge of sailing in her travels.

But she failed to recollect that the ingenious arrangement of objects on the table had been successful with one side of the table up; now that side went down, and there was another wild stampede on the part of knives, bottles, dishes and loaves, in the opposite direction. Nay, that was not the worst. In the midst of the confused seizure of these things—with Mrs. Warrener uttering sharp cries of warning—an awful sound was heard in one of the adjoining state-rooms. Mr. Drummond looked grave.

"You'd better go and see what it is, James," his sister said, keeping firm hold of the pie until it should be buttressed up.

He went, and came back with a serious face.

"My gun-case," he observed, calmly, "has fallen on the ewer; the ewer has been pitched against my bed; the bed is swimming with water; and the ewer is broken."

"Oh, James!" his sister said, "didn't I tell you to put that great heavy thing on the floor, or in the bed itself, and not on a shelf?"

"Do you think," said he, "there would be much chance of getting the blankets dried on deck?"

The question was not so foolish as it looked, for when they went above again, they found that the rain had entirely ceased, the rain-clouds were withdrawing up the hills, and the great lonely mountains of Mull and Morven were being slowly revealed. What a desolate coast it looked in this sombre, gray light! The dark and leaden sea broke in white along the gloomy rocks; gaunt gray precipices here and there led up to a silent wilderness of heather; and across the bare slopes of the hills the white mists moved like great troops of ghosts—armies that met and parted, that met and mingled together in a silent strife—obeying the mysterious behests of the spirits of the winds. And by-and-by a curious and suffused light began to declare itself behind these moving veils of mist; higher slopes of the mountains, hitherto unseen, became visible in a ghostly fashion; the glow of light increased; and then, as the clouds parted and passed on, the bright warm sunshine sprung down in their wake, and the mighty hills shone in resplendent greens and yellows. The decks of the *Sea-Pyot* soon dried up; water-proofs were thrown aside, and now the rolling waves had dashes of blue in them where they caught the color of the opening sky.

"That is the way with this coast," observed Mr Drummond, who had lighted his pipe, and contentedly stretched out his legs on the white deck; "the weather changes every thirty minutes, and the scenery every thirty seconds. Miller, why don't you go below and get something to eat?"

"Thank you. By-and-by," was the answer.

"Shall I go down and get some things out for you?" Violet suggested.

This was a kind offer, for the young lady had been intrusted with the tiller—under the superintendence of Captain Jimmy, who stood hard by—and she was amusing herself with various small experiments as to how near the wind *Sea-Pyot* would sail.

"Oh no; don't you trouble," he answered.

"Here, Captain Jimmy, take the rope," she said. "My arms can't hold out any longer. Come along, Mr. Miller; Duncan and I will get you something."

He could not very well refuse so friendly a proposal; and so at last he got up, threw off his water-proof, and followed her down the twisting companion-stairs. A small bell summoned Duncan into the saloon. And now Mr. Miller found himself the object of those very attentions which, since his arrival in the Highlands, he had observed Violet pay to Mr. Drummond. She played the part of handmaiden to perfection; and he could not do otherwise than appear grateful to her. And yet he was dimly conscious that her manner toward him was not that she displayed toward Mr. Drummond. She was solicitous about his comfort, it is true; but it was with a friendly, half-patronizing solicitude such as an old campaigner, if bent on kindness, might show to an inexperienced young person encountered by chance. It was in a very different way that she treated Mr. Drummond. With him she was all meekness and submission; she was content to remain a silent listener so long as he pleased to speak; such little services as she could render him were all done in an underhand, unobtrusive manner as if she would rather not have them noticed.

"Don't you wait down here, Violet," said he; "I am sure you would rather be up on deck."

"Oh no," she said, carelessly; "I have constituted myself chief cook and steward on board, for I don't think Duncan is up to much, and I must see every body properly fed. As soon as you have finished, I want the table. I mean to surprise Mr. Drummond with an apricot-jam pudding at dinner; you will see his look of wonder when that appears."

"I should have thought so profound a philosopher would not have cared for such trifles," remarked Mr. Miller.

"It is because he is a philosopher," said Violet, warmly, "that he cares for both little things and great things."

"Including apricot-jam."

"I don't see any harm in any one liking apricot-jam. I like it myself—I am most particularly fond of it."

"Well, of course; you show yourself a most docile pupil all day long."

She took no notice of the sneer against herself, for she was bent on clearing her master and teacher from the deadly charge that had been preferred against him.

"If there is any body in the world that puts little store by eating and drinking and such things, it is Mr. Drummond. He is not one of the men who live only to get good dinners and a lot of money. He is the most unworldly and unselfish man I have ever seen or heard of."

There was a little extra color in her face. The young man, who was busy with the cold pie, did not answer; perhaps he was afraid of saying all he thought just at that moment.

Violet rang the bell.

"Duncan, as soon as Mr. Miller has finished, will you clear the table, please? And get me the flour and things, and an empty bottle, if you haven't a roller. When will the men have their dinner?"

Duncan paused for a minute; his English was not fluent.

"I think, mem, when we get into Loch Sunart."

"Then I will make a pudding for them too; and you can have that first, for we sha'n't want dinner till seven."

"Very well, mem."

"Would you kindly ring the bell when you have finished?" she asked, somewhat coldly, of Mr. Miller; and then she turned and left the saloon, and went on deck.

By this time they had got well past Loch Salen, and right ahead of them lay the open Alantic, with Tobermory lighthouse on their left, and on their right the gaunt precipices of Ardnamurchan Point running out to the ocean. The sun was wearing round to the west; and a warmer light lay over the vast panorama of mountains, shores, and sea. The wind had gone down a bit, too; and Captain Jimmy was looking forward to the time when, having got up to the mouth of Loch Sunart, he should be able to alter the course of the *Sea-Pyot* and let her run in before the wind to her anchorage for the night.

Mrs. Warrener linked her hand within Violet's arm, and led her forward a bit, apparently the better to command a view of the open sea.

"Violet, what have you been doing to Mr. Miller?"

"Nothing," the girl answered.

"There is some thing the matter with him: you see that."

"Yes, I do," she replied; and then she said, with proud indifference, "I have done nothing to offend him that I know of. If he chooses to make himself unpleasant, how can I help it? Look at him now—reading a book, and taking no notice of all this wonderful place. We may look forward to a delightful trip if he keeps on in that way."

"Violet," said Mrs. Warrener, gently, "you ought not to speak of him like that; you ought to make excuses for him."

"Why should I, any more than any one else? I wish to be as friendly with him as with any one; but when I see him making this return for your brother's kindness in asking him to go with us—"

"Oh, James doesn't mind. Probably he doesn't see it."

"I wish I could believe he was sea-sick," said Violet, rather cruelly. "But it isn't that, for he has been smoking cigars all day. People say that on board a ship is a dreadful place for making people quarrel; but we haven't been on board here long enough, surely. There is one thing, however, certain enough. A ship is a bad place to bottle up inflammable materials in. If he imagines himself wronged or hurt in any way, there will be an explosion—and that before long."

She was right in her conjecture, as events were soon to prove; but in the mean time, could any thing be more peaceful and peace-suggesting than the scenes through which the *Sea-Pyot* was now gently bearing them? They had turned aside from the broad waters of the Sound, and were now running, before a light breeze, into a long and winding loch that lay between hills and mountains of singular beauty of form and color. The solemn evening light, touching the higher peaks, seemed to add to the silence and loneliness of the shadows below, where the gray heron stood motionless under the black rocks, and here and there the dark head of a seal appeared in the smooth waters of the succeeding bays. It was without a sound that the *Sea-Pyot* glided past the successive headlands; but her arrival was announced from time to time by the far call of the curlew, startling the silence of the place, and awakening answering cries from other seabirds along the coast. At length they sailed into a solitary little bay, where the water was almost without a ripple, and here the impressive stillness that reigned around was suddenly broken by the loud, harsh rattle of the chain-cable as the anchor plunged. The curlews whistled their warning-note as they fled along the shore; the sea-pyots screamed shrilly as they flew away across the loch, skimming the water in their flight; a single heron, uttering a low, harsh croak, heavily lifted his long wings and disappeared in the gathering twilight. Then all was peace again; and the darkness came gently down over the mountains, and over the still bosom of the lake, until one could scarcely make out the shore.

If the prosaic details of yachting had been prominent during the day, they were no longer so in the mystic silence of the night as the stars came out over the hills, and the ripple against the side of the vessel broke in a million sparks of phosphorescent fire. Then the moon arose; and the shore and the hills began to appear again in the glowing light, until another world stood revealed, cold and silent and still. The red glow of the cabin sky-light was the only point of intense color in all this pale picture; even as in the yacht itself, where peace and silence seemed to prevail, there was but one fierce and hidden fire—in a man's heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MAGIC MERGANSER.

AT this point, and in common courtesy to his readers, the writer of these pages considers himself bound to give fair warning that the following chapter deals solely and wholly with the shooting of mergansers, curlews, herons, and such like fearful wild fowl; therefore, those who regard such graceless idling with aversion, and are anxious to get on with the story, should at once proceed to chapter twenty-three. There is no just reason, one might urge, why fiction should speak only of those days in a man's life in which something supremely good or supremely bad happened to him—jumping over the far greater number of days in which nothing particular happened to him—and thereby recording the story of his life in a jerky, *staccato*, impossible manner. Destiny is not forever marching on with majestic stride; even the horrid Furies sometimes put away their whips. Give a man a gun, place him on a highland loch on a still day in August, show him a few dark specks swimming round the distant promontories, and he will forget that there is even such a thing as to-morrow. To write out the whole story of his life in this fashion would, of course, be impossible; for it would be twenty times as long as the longest Japanese drama in existence; while the death-rate among the readers—say twenty-four in a thousand per annum—would interfere with the continued attention demanded by the author. But occasionally, in the briefest story, one of these idle and unmemorable days ought to come in, just to show that the people are not always brooding over the plan of their lives. Anyhow—and this is the long and short of it—three out of five of the passengers on board the *Sea-Pyot* are going in pursuit of mergansers, and the gentle reader is entreated to grant them this one holiday, which will be the last of its kind.

"What else, indeed, could they do? There was no wind to take them out of the beautiful little bay in which they were anchored. When Violet came up and saw how still and clear the water was—small fish, "cuddies," could be seen at a wonderful depth—she immediately darted down again and brought up with her one of the bottles out of the cruet-stand.

"Did you ever see the most beautiful thing in the world?" she called out.

When they confessed they had not, she emptied, regardless of expense, the contents of the mustard-pot into the sea, close by the side of the vessel, and immediately the great shining depths beneath them were filled with particles of glittering gold, the sun gleaming on them as they slowly sunk, and causing the sea to look as if it were so much *Goldeneswasser* from Dantzig.

"That is a pretty trick, Miss Violet," remarked a tall gentleman standing there. "Perhaps you will kindly fill that bottle again?"

"Oh yes, certainly," remarked the young lady, with much coolness, as she went below.

"Now, Jimmy," continued Mr. Drummond, turning to the skipper, with whom he had been talking, "you don't really mean to say that a seal flung stones at you? Come, now—I will make every allowance for winter-time—and idleness—and the necessity of stories; but you know, Jimmy, that is a little too much—"

"I declare to you, sir," said the yellow-bearded, brown-complexioned man, with some Highland vehemence, "it is as true as you are standing there. Is it stones? Tam him, he nearly felled my head off wi' stones as big as your hand, and bigger. For I was in a boat when I shot at him; and I sah he couldna get down to the watter; and I knew that I had struck him. And when I got on the shore to run up to him, tam him, be began to fling the stones at my head; and he did not fling them as a man would fling them, but backward, with his head turned away from you; and you should hef seen how he will catch the stones up with his fins, or his hands, or whatever it is. And there was no use waiting, sir, so I will run up to him as hard as I could, and I will fall on him then, and catch him round the head, and it was no more stones he will fling after I had the grip of him. See! sir, see!—there is one now—going into the weeds."

About sixty yards off, making in for the shore, they could descry a round brown object, moving from side to side. Young Miller, who had his gun in his hand, instantly put it up to his shoulder; Drummond as quickly caught the barrels and turned them aside.

"By the ashes of my grandfather, there shall not be a shot fired at a seal while we are in these waters! What is the use? If you wound him, he dives; if you kill him, he sinks; and if you got him, what would you do with him? The skin is worth nothing. Then he is the most harmless and gentle creature—"

"Especially when he throws stones at you."

"Wouldn't you throw stones, or any thing else, at any one who peppered you with a charge of duck-shot?"

"Then what are we to shoot when we go out to-day?" inquired the younger man, with some resentment. "You have got up a regular list, now, of things that must not be touched. If they only knew, the birds and beasts might come on board here as a sort of sanctuary—"

"Well, I will tell you what we must shoot. First of all, that abominable wretch, the curlew, for he is a screaming tell-tale, and he is likewise very good to eat. Then I believe those gentle creatures below are rather anxious to have some heron's feathers; you may shoot a heron or two when you get the chance—only they don't, as a rule, come and perch on the point of your barrels. But, above all, we must slay duck—wild duck—the bird that looks inelegant in the air, but beautiful on the table—him we must seize by fair means or foul, else we shall have nothing to break the monotony of mutton for days and days to come, and we may even run short of mutton, if we come to a place where the postmaster hasn't been killing lately. Three or four miles from here, up one of the side lochs, Jimmy says the place swarms with duck, and there will be some that are flappers yet. I grieve to think of destroying these young things before they have grown tired of the world; but Jimmy says they are exceedingly good to eat. Of course, if these duck had any sense, they would give up eating grass and fresh water-weeds, and take to sea-weed, and shrimps, and young jelly-fish, and so on, until they grew as fishy as a fine, old, rich-flavored solan. Then people would let them alone."

"But this is salt-water we have here."

"Yes."

"And it is salt-water in the loch we are going up?"

"Certainly."

"Then what are the wild duck doing here, if they live on fresh-water weeds?"

"I don't know. How can I tell? I am informed that wild duck abound here in great numbers; I have seen birds resembling duck swimming in the loch; I have asked if they were widgeon—no, they are not widgeon; that is all I know."

"Perhaps they come down from the mountain streams to have a swim in the loch."

"Perhaps they do. We will shoot them, and ask them for an explanation."

It was about ten o'clock that forenoon that the gig was lowered and two stalwart young fellows got in to hand down the guns, cartridge-bags, luncheon-baskets, etc. Just as Mr. George Miller had taken his station at the bow, the men on the thwarts, and Mr. Drummond at the stern, and as they were about to bid "Good-bye" to those left on the board the yacht, it suddenly occurred to Miss Violet that she would like very much to join this shooting expedition. She pleaded earnestly. Mr. Miller opened his eyes wide, and said she had better do nothing of the sort. Mr. Drummond, looking up from his seat in the stern, said,

"Are you willing to have your ears dinned?"

"Quite."

"Are you afraid of being shot?"

"Not if I sit near you: if I were six yards off, I should be."

This insult was too much.

"Give way, lads, give way!" he called out.

"No! Don't! Wait a minute!" she called out also; and the men stopped.

"Please, Mr. Drummond, let me go with you, and I shall be most respectful to you the whole time. You want somebody to bring back the story. You could not, your two selves, begin to tell all the wonderful things you did. Please let me go?"

"Come along, then," and he rose and handed her down into the boat, where she took her seat beside him. In another minute or two the gig was well away from the yacht, making for a narrow channel in the loch between some small islands and the main-land.

"Now," said he to his companion, "you must preserve strict silence."

"Very well," she said, obediently.

Having placed this injunction on her, he forthwith proceeded to descant most unconcernedly on the quick hearing and long sight of birds, on the cunning of savages in capturing wild animals, on the instinctive yearning in civilized life for a brief return to the freedom, physical toil, and excitement enjoyed by the savage in his pursuit of game and so forth, and so forth. She remained absolutely silent; but there was a demure smile about her lips. It was not until he was proceeding to expound to her that the radical vice of the English political character was its contempt for parochial affairs—that every boy fresh from the university was prepared to reform the Constitution, but would not stoop to learn any thing of the local raising and application of taxes, and so forth, that she ventured to say,

"Do I speak more loudly than you? How is it you have no fear of frightening away the birds?"

Just at this minute they were startled by a loud whirring of wings and a shrill whistle; and a large gray object was seen to flash along the front of the rocks ahead of them. Bang! bang! went two barrels at the bow—the bird flew on and disappeared. But now on all sides, in this seemingly silent and deserted place, a wild confusion arose. Half a dozen oyster-catchers flew out from the shore, their red bills and legs shining in the sun, and made away up the loch; everywhere there was a calling of curlews; a flock of sandpipers rose and twisted about in the air exactly like snipe; two or three herons, with slowly flapping wings, and legs hanging down, disappeared over the nearest promontory.

"Why didn't you shoot that curlew?" Drummond called out.

The answer showed that the young man at the bow had been nursing a silent rage all this time.

"I should like to know how we are likely to shoot any thing so long as you go on talking like that," he said, sharply. "And I knew how it would be."

"Why," Drummond called out, good-naturedly, "the bird wasn't thirty yards off when he rose; you won't get such another chance at a curlew if you wait here twenty years."

"Well, I think we may as well go back to the yacht."

"I don't think you can swim as far, can you? Never mind, Miller; we must keep quiet now. You needn't pull, lads; the current will carry us through those channels. Miller, keep a good lookout."

There was now no more about the instinct of savages or the taxation of Camberwell; for the rising tide, producing a strong current running up the loch, was carrying the cutter silently through certain twisting channels between the island and the shore. The shore was at this point both rocky and wooded—young ash and birch coming down in many places close to the water; while round the islands the tide was still low enough to display a broad fringe of brown sea-weed. There was therefore every chance of finding plenty of wild fowl about.

Silently and stealthily they stole by the successive promontories, sometimes catching a glimpse of a heron heavily flying away far ahead of them, and again listening to the distant call of the curlew. Suddenly Miss Violet touched her companion's arm. A heron had come right overhead; flying from the shore, it had discovered its mistake too late to turn right back, and was now making for the islands. Miss Violet put her hands to her ears, but she still looked up. The next second her head was violently shaken by the report of the gun and a huge confused mass of feathers came tumbling down into the sea, some five-and-twenty yards off. When they rowed back for it against the current and hauled it on board, they found it to be a very large heron, about three feet and a half from bill to claw, and in very fair plumage. But they had scarcely got the heron into the boat when their attention was called to a flock of birds that had risen from the shores of an island near, and were twisting this way and that in the air, the flock showing white one minute and gray the next.

"Surely they're snipe!" called out Miller; and one of the sailors—who seemed to have as much interest as any one in what was going on—called out in reply,

"Ay, they're snipe, sir! see, there they're coming round now."

The flock made one of their abrupt wheels, and swept by the bow of the boat some forty yards off. Mr. Miller fired both his barrels into the thick of them—anxious to have the larder of the yacht supplied with such goodly prey—and as the birds sheered off to the left, Mr. Drummond sent a parting shot after them. Three fell.

"Only three, after all that noise!" called out a young lady who had promised silence.

But what was their disgust, on pulling up to the birds and hauling them in, to find that, in place of the coveted snipe, they were only poor little sandpipers, whose fatal resemblance to the snipe in their length of bill and manner of flying had brought on them this destruction. The disappointment of the shooters, however, was as nothing to the pity expressed by their gentle companion, who regarded herself as an accessory to this slaughter of the innocents.

"You can eat sandpipers," remonstrated Mr. Miller.

"You can eat thrushes and nightingales," was the retort, "and who wants to do that?"

By this time they had drifted through the narrow channels, and the men took to their oars again. They were now in front of a broad and shallow bay, some four or five miles in circumference, the smooth waters of which reflected the tender colors of the great mountains lying between the level shores and the sky. In many places these flat shores showed long stretches of white sand coming down to the water's edge and there fringed with an abundance of weeds that offered excellent shelter for wild fowl. Indeed, they could now descry, at several points near the land, certain groups of dark specks moving slowly in the water; at last they had come to the haunt of the wild duck.

They had no dog, no stalking-horse, no flat-bottomed punt; there was nothing for it but to pull straight for the duck, on the chanch of getting a shot when they rose and wheeled overhead. It was also very doubtful whether they could get anywhere near the land, the water in this broad and sandy bay being so shallow near the shore. Already in the far crystal deeps they could descry the long tangles of the sea-weed; they seemed to be passing over transparent roof of a magical marine palace garlanded by the mysterious inhabitants of the sea.

The five birds they were now approaching showed no sign either of getting up or betaking themselves to the exposed sea-weed of the rocks, where they could easily have hidden themselves. They only swam a little more actively about in the water, obviously regarding the strangers, and perhaps drawing a trifle nearer to the shore. At last Mr. Miller said, in a loud whisper,

"Shall I fire a shot to put them up? We shall be aground directly."

"All right," was the answer.

Miller, who was crouching down, stealthily put the barrels of his gun over the bow, put the stock to his shoulder, and, taking a long and steady aim, fired. The silence of the bay resounded to the report. Then Mr. Drummond, jumping up to take better aim, looked round.

There was no sign whatever of the duck. Miller had seen the shot strike the water all round them and over them; but they had apparently ducked the flash so successfully that not a feather remained to tell of their having been there. The two sportsmen stood in the boat, gun in hand, in momentary expectation of seeing one of those black objects re-appear on the surface of the blue water. They waited in vain.

Just then one of the oarsmen called aloud and pointed to three duck flying almost overhead, at a considerable height, and toward the stern of the boat. It was but a hap-hazard shot; but all the same Mr. Drummond put up his gun and fired.

"I have him this time," he said, as one of the three came down like the stick of a rocket and splashed into the water. Mr. Drummond paid no attention to the bird; he was busy in putting another cartridge into the empty barrel; but Violet called out,

"Where is that duck? I can't see him."

There was no duck visible.

"Confound it!" said Drummond, "I never saw a duck like that before."

"I see him, sir—there he is!" cried the sailor Alec; and then the two plunged their oars in the water and made away for the spot where the bird had come up—some hundred yards or so from where it had fallen. Directly, however, the duck dived again; and was no more seen, though they waited about the place for five or six minutes.

They would try again. They pulled across the loch—with curlews and sea-pyots and sandpipers screaming and flying before them—and again they drew near a group of those dark objects which were paddling in by the shore. On approaching them, however, these birds did make an effort to rise; but they could only whir along the surface of the water for a short distance, whipping it with their wings as they went.

"By Jove! they are flappers," Drummond called out. "Pull away, my lads; you shall have a brace for your dinner."

The young duck could fly no farther; they were swimming as rapidly as they could, looking round every minute at the enemy, who was rapidly gaining on them. At length Miller called out,

"We must fire now, or they will dive: take the outside ones first."

Again the silent bay resounded with the loud banging of the guns; and one after the other charges of shot struck the water, churning it into a white foam. The seven birds had separated, swimming in various directions; so that the aim and effect of each shot were clearly visible. By rights four of the birds should have been killed; for apparently four charges of lead had struck down on them; but when the smoke had cleared away nothing was to be seen but one of the birds that was half fluttering and half swimming in to the land. For a second or two they waited to see if any of the other six would come up again; they looked in vain: in their bewilderment they called on the men to pull after this remaining duck, which was at least visible.

Visible? That had disappeared too.

"Will any body tell me," Mr. Drummond asked, looking round in amazement, "whether we are in a Highland loch or in some confounded incantation-scene? Alec, my lad, do you really say these birds are wild duck?"

"Ay, sir," said the young sailor, seriously, "it iss sure enough they are wild duck; but it iss not easy the shooting of them, for the wicket teffles they will tife and hould on to the weeds at the bottom."

"No, no, no!" Drummond cried, scornfully, "no man will persuade me that these are wild duck. Your mallard is a respectable and gentlemanly bird, and when you kill him he dies, and there is an end of it. Gracious powers, look at that!"

He pointed to the clear and shallow water, and they could see a sort of wavy track in it some few yards off. Directly afterward they saw that this was a bird—probably one of the duck that had dived farther out—swimming under the water with singular rapidity, and making for the shore.

"We must have this fellow, anyway," Drummond called out, "for there is no weed at all there;" and, just as he spoke, the bird bobbed up its head and looked around. Drummond fired; the shot struck the water exactly at the proper place; but the bird had dived before it reached him. The bow of the boat grated on the sand; they could pull no farther in. But once again the duck, finding no shelter, appeared on the surface of the water; and this time a snapshot of Mr. Miller's stretched him lifeless.

"The wicket wee teffle, we hef him now!" remarked Alec, as he jumped into the water and waded across to the bird.

"Now let us examine this mystical creature," Mr. Drummond said, "and if it proves to be a new phenomenon—a being hitherto unknown to science—we will give it a name. I suggest *Anas magica*—"

"I should think *jack-in-the-box vulgaris* would do," interposed Violet.

The mysterious wild fowl was here handed into the boat. Certainly it bore all the outward signs of being a duck. It had the ruddy-brown and gray-speckled plumage of a duck; it had the white banded wings and the tail of a duck; it had the heavy, waddling body of a duck; it had the webbed feet of a duck. The only apparent point of difference was the bill, which, instead of being short and flat, was long, narrow and pointed, with a row of small, sharp, serrated teeth on each side.

"Alec!" Mr. Drummond suddenly exclaimed, "I believe you have deceived me. This is no duck at all."

"Ay, sir, it iss a duck," Alec maintained, adding philosophically, "and it iss ferry good for eating whateffer."

"Why, man, look at the bill—that bird lives on fish. He will taste like a gannet or a douker. Why—now when I think of it—surely it must be—I am certain this must be the merganser—"

"The what?"

"The merganser. I never saw one; but when I was at Oxford a man I knew there shot one of them, one very hard winter, quite close by the town; and I have a vague recollection of his believing he had shot a brace of wild duck. Alec, you don't mean to say that you call this animal a duck?"

"It iss a duck, and it iss no others you will get; and ferry good they are for the eating," Alec maintained, sturdily.

"Well, well, if you say so, we must try to get some more. How many cartridges have we fired? The merganser takes a deal of powder and shot: he ought to be good for the eating."

And so the luckless merganser was pitched beside the dead heron; and there was no use remaining in this bay, where all the birds had been disturbed by the firing (even the gulls were wheeling high in the air), the men pulled away for the next arm of this long and winding loch. The world had grown still again, save for the clanking of the oars. They saw one or two seals off an island lying out in the lake; their black heads motionless on the smooth water. At last they came in sight of a long promontory partly covered with wood; and here it was judged advisable that young Miller should go on shore, creep round by the wood, and steal out to the end of this promontory, while Mr. Drummond, in the boat, would lie in ambush for such birds as might be driven his way.

The young man went off—picking his way over the big stones and through the tall weeds that here lined the shore—and by-and-by they saw him crouching along by the landward hollows until he disappeared on the other side of the promontory. They awaited the result of his expedition in absolute silence. Suddenly, however, Violet touched her companion's arm. A heron—with an indiscretion that rarely characterizes that most wary of birds—was coming slowly down the loch, and apparently about to pass the boat at not more than twenty yards' distance. Indeed, he had got to within thirty yards of the bow—flying close to the water, and apparently quite heedless—when he sheered off a bit, and that so little, that he remained within shot for at least ten or twelve seconds. Mr. Drummond did not put up his gun.

"One is enough," he said, indifferently; "you will have plenty of feathers. And that was a young one—both young and foolish—"

Here they heard the crack of Miller's gun; and directly afterward it seemed as if these silent coasts had sprung into life. There was a calling and shrieking of birds; another shot, and still another, followed in quick succession; three or four herons appeared over the promontory (looking huge objects against the clear sky), and rose high into the air as they made for the mountains—a string of ducks was seen to shoot across the loch, followed by another shot from the point—and all about came flying curlews, and gulls, and oyster-catchers, the last flying most quickly of all, with their white and black plumage gleaming in the sun. Mr. Drummond had his gun in readiness for the curlews; but as they successively came down the loch they caught sight of the boat and got easily out of reach. All except one; and that one had come over the bushes above before he discovered what was lying underneath. He gave a shrill whistle and altered his flight; but it was too late; the next second he was lying motionless on the still water.

At this moment they saw young Miller on the top of the promontory, waving to them with his cap.

"Pull away, boys," Drummond said, when they had picked up the curlew. "I suppose he wants to chase some more of these mergansers."

When they came up to the promontory, they saw several objects lying on the water, while at the feet of the young man lay a heron extended on the rocks. They picked up the birds for him—two sea-pyots and a merganser—and then pulled in for the shore, where they all landed to have luncheon.

"What's the use of shooting sea-pyots?" Mr. Drummond asked. "There were lots of curlew about."

"I shot what I could get to shoot," the young man answered, testily. "I haven't seen you shoot a curlew yet."

"You might have done," was the careless answer, "if you had been in the boat. However, I suppose the girls will be able to do something with the plumage—it is very beautiful."

"No, thank you, as far as I am concerned," Violet said;

"I only wanted some of those gray feathers of the heron. It seems a pity to shoot birds for no reason at all."

The young man sat down to his luncheon in no very enviable mood. He was convinced that if Mr. Drummond had shot the oyster-catchers she would have found reason enough. Fortunately, he was not dependent on the caprices of a girl; and as he had come out to enjoy a day's shooting, he was determined to enjoy himself in his own fashion; and she might continue to show such preferences as pleased her.

Cold mutton, bread, and bottled ale are very welcome things when one has been plunging about in the Highland air for four or five hours; and then there was a soda-water bottle half filled with whisky for the sailors, who had their share of the luncheon in the boat. They were now within sight of the extremity of this arm of Loch Sunart, which is called Loch Tyachus, or some such name; so that whatever remained to them of shooting was confined within this long shallow bay, which was even larger than the one they had previously explored. Moreover, Alec informed them that there were always large quantities of duck up at the head of the loch, where a river came down to the salt-water; and it was a matter for speculation whether, in this fresh water, there might not be some mallard or teal. To get a few ducks of this description would guard them against the risk of finding the mergansers, in spite of Alec's vehement assertions, uneatable.

"Do you see those cottages away up there at the head of the loch?" said Mr. Drummond, as he lighted a contemplative pipe. "Fancy living in such a place—all by yourself—confronted day and night by those lonely mountains. One might get into a sort of apprehensive state—so that each morning you might get up and be quite surprised that the whole bubble hadn't burst up—"

"What bubble?" asked Violet, innocently.

"Why, the earth. You couldn't know much of history here; and even then history is but a point. The Romans knew no more of how they came into the world than we do; they and we are but as one in that—and in the point of time too—and to-morrow the whole business might be cracked up by a collision, and the universe go on without heeding that trifling and common occurrence. I don't see any road to those cottages. If the people come along this shore, their carts must have strong axle-trees. And, in passing, a lurch might mix up two carts just as if they were railway-carriages. I remember a friend of mine, an Englishman, who used to drive his family about the country in a wagonette, and one day he he came to that awfully narrow bit in the Pass of Brander, and just then he found the coach coming down the other way. By rights he should have taken the outside, where there isn't a stone to save you from the brink of the precipice; but he swore to himself that no human power would take him to that side of the road. The coach came on; the guard blew his horn; my friend stuck to the right of the road, close by the hill. The coach came close up. 'Take your own side of the road!' bellowed the driver. 'Take your own side of the road!' bellowed the guard. 'Mes amis,' said my friend, with a shrug of the shoulders. 'Je ne vous comprends pas!' 'Take to your own side of the road, you unmentionable foreigner!' called out the driver again. My friend only smiled sweetly, and took off his hat with a most courteous bow. There was nothing for it. The guard tried to explain by signs: no use. They had to lead the horses of the coach past on the outside; and then, as my friend drove on, he kissed his hand to them, and said, 'Mes bons amis, je vous donne mille remerciments; je baise les mains a vous, messieurs.'"

If Mr. George Miller and Violet had been on more intimate terms they would have looked at each other significantly. Both had an awful conviction that no such person as this mock-Frenchman existed; that no such incident had ever occurred; that the whole thing had been suggested by the imagined difficulty of getting two carts to pass each other on the stony shores of Loch Tyachus. But they could not give utterance to these suspicions at the moment, for they were now summoned down to the gig of the *Sea-Pyot* by the intelligence that a large brood of ducks was visible farther along the shores of the loch.

There was a trifle more vigor in the pulling of the men after the luncheon and whisky, and the boat swung forward at a good speed. Once they were suddenly checked by the appearance of a bird sitting on the water a short distance ahead; but it turned out that this was only a small glebe, and so they proceeded. By-and-by they came near to the cottages; and they could distinguish one or two women, with a lot of children, who had come to see what strange intrusion was this. The birds were now but forty or fifty yards ahead, well inshore; and with a caution to avoid firing in the direction of the cottages, lest the *ricochet* of a stray shot should reach the children, Drummond called on his younger friend to fire on chance. A charge of shot dashed into the water; the whole of the birds dived and disappeared but one, that got up and flew out toward the middle of the lake, making a semicircle round the boat. Miller, at the bow, having just put in another cartridge, fired his first barrel; and one could see by the direction of the smoke, wadding, and so forth, that the shot must have rattled all round the duck. He fired his second barrel, and again the direction seemed all that could be desired. Drummond, the bird having now got farther round, also had his two barrels at the flying target; and when the duck was finally seen to get clear away from all these showers of lead, Miss Violet clapped her hands and declared that he deserved to escape.

"It was a merganser," observed Mr. Drummond, thoughtfully; "any other bird would have been killed four times over. Each of those charges went all round him; and yet he never moved a feather—"

The speaker stopped. What was this enormous bird coming flying down at a great rate of speed, with long neck outstretched and huge wings?

"Look out!" Miller cried. "A wild goose, by Jove!"

He had the first shot, and evidently struck the bird, which altered its line of flight; but before it had gone much farther, a charge of No. 3 from Mr. Drummond's gun had caught the prodigy, which now fell head-foremost into the sea-weed.

"Put round the boat, Alec!" cried Miss Violet, in great excitement. "Now, that is something! Pull away, Alec! quick—quick!"

"He's dead enough," said Mr. Drummond, for indeed the large bird was lying among the brown sea-weed with its wings outstretched.

"It is as big as an albatross!" said young Miller. "And he got the full benefit of my first barrel before you brought him down."

But at this moment the whole complexion of affairs was changed by a singular incident. They now observed that one of the women was coming down to the shore, uttering a series of shrill sounds that appeared to be violent reproaches, and shaking her clenched hand in the air. Our voyagers stared at each other. What could be the matter? As she came nearer, it appeared she was an old woman, violently excited, and calling out to them in a language they could not understand.

"We can not have hurt any body," said Mr. Drummond; "there was no firing anywhere near the direction of the cottages."

"I think it wass the goose, sir," said Alec, gravely.

"The goose?"

"Ay; I think the goose wass belonging to the old woman."

An awful possibility flashed into their minds. By this time they had run the boat in among the stones; and they got out and went up to the old woman, who, still scolding away in this unknown tongue, was standing by the body of the dead bird. When they regarded the luckless animal their fears were confirmed. It was, in fact, a respectable old gander.

"Gracious heavens! Alec," cried Drummond, "will you explain the matter to this furious old woman? Tell her that geese in our country don't go flying out to sea and pretending to be wild birds. Tell her this old gander fell a prey to his vanity. Tell her—"

But Miss Violet had taken a better way of silencing the old woman. She had put a couple of sovereigns in her hand and held them out. The old woman ceased her angry denunciations, and regarded the coin with a suspicious curiosity. She took them up, looked at them, bit them with her teeth; then she called aloud for her neighbor, a younger woman, who was shyly standing at some little distance. The latter came timidly forward, and, when appealed to, looked at the sovereigns. The result of the examination was not favorable.

"Na, na!" the old woman cried; and she was beginning once more to denounce the wanton cruelty of the strangers, when Alec, in as forcible Gaelic as her own, broke in upon her.

What ensued, of course, our travelers could not tell; they could only guess from gestures and tones. At length Alec said, with a sort of bashful smile,

"She'll no tek the English money, sir. She thinks that you intended to kill her gander, sir—"

"Why don't you tell her that such a fool of a bird richly deserves its fate?"

"She says if you will pay for it, it must be in good money—"

"Does she mean in one-pound notes?"

"Yes, sir."

This was awkward. Not one of them had a Scotch note. Seeing their dilemma, Alec said, with some hesitation,

"I hef one or two notes, sir—"

"All right, Alec. Let's have a couple of them; and here are two good English sovereigns."

"Ay," said Alec, with still greater embarrassment, "but they are sewn up in the waistband of my troosers—"

"All right—cut them out; you can sew them up afterward."

"Ay, sir," said Alec, looking very doubtfully at his master, "but I will hef to tek the troosers off—"

"Oh, I see," said Mr. Drummond, hastily. "Well, off you go up to the cottage, turn the children out, and get the money. I am sorry to spoil your clothes for you, but you shall all have an extra glass of grog to-night—"

"And you shall have a pudding for to-morrow's dinner, seeing it's Sunday," added Violet.

"And a merganser apiece," suggested Mr. Miller, with a laugh.

It was not without a great deal of arguing that the old woman would consent to Alec's going up to the cottage, for she evidently suspected he meant to steal her fowls; and when at length she allowed him to go, she went with him as guard, while she left her neighbor to look after the others, lest they should run away with the gander and leave Alec as an unprofitable hostage.

Moreover, when they came back from the cottage they were still arguing and quarreling.

"What is the matter now, Alec? Haven't you found the money?"

"Ay, I hef the money," said the young sailor, showing the two notes in his hand, "but the old witch she will want the money and the goose too; an' I will say to her she gets far too much for the goose; and when the goose is paid for, it will be no longer belonging to her."

"Never mind, Alec. Give the old woman the money, and her gander too. They were together in their lives, and in death they shall not be divided. Get into the boat, young people. Good-day to you, old lady: beware of keeping vain and pretentious ganders."

So they stood out to sea again, resolved to commit no further farm-yard depredations. And indeed they were fairly successful in another direction; for, having by slow degrees worked this way and that across the loch, they had driven the birds up to the shallow water at its extremity, and here the sea-fowl would inevitably pass them again rather than go inland. As for the wild duck, which Alec had prophesied would be found in large numbers around the estuary of the small river, they discovered that these were but the ubiquitous merganser; and as grave doubts existed as to whether the flesh of the merganser was worth its salt, they were more intent on getting a few curlews, with perhaps a golden plover or two, several of which they had observed beyond range. Certainly, when they got up to the head of the loch, there was no lack of birds. In every direction there were cries and warning whistles—some flocks rising in a body and making off round the shore, others separating in confusion and making straight back down the loch. It was out of the latter that they made their bag. In the noise and confusion, even the wary curlew occasionally came right over the gig, and there was a sufficiently fierce discharge of ammunition. Product of the day's expedition: two herons, five mergansers, five curlews, two oyster-catchers, and three sandpipers. Missing, a gander.

It was a long pull back to the yacht, and Mr. Drummond and Miller were for taking a turn at the oars. But the young fellows would not hear of that: perhaps they were cheered up by the promise of a feast on the morrow.

And so the gig glided down between the silent shores of Loch Tyachus—and passed the islands where the seals were still to be seen—and got through the narrow channels back into the bay of Loch Sunart, where the *Sea-Pyot* lay at her anchorage. It had been a long, busy, enjoyable day; to all appearance no gloomy surmises, no anxious thoughts had interfered with the pleasures of holiday-making.

Violet knew nothing of these surmises and anxieties; and yet she could not help asking herself how it was that Mr. Drummond sometimes spoke as he had spoken while they sat on the rocks after luncheon—as if the world had nothing further for him—as if life were of but little account. It is true that these utterances had no taint of envy nor even of disappointment in them; perhaps, indeed, they were more the result of hap-hazard fancies than the expression of personal feeling; and yet she did not fail to detect in them an undernote of sadness. She knew there was no sacrifice she would not gladly undertake for the happiness of this the best of all her friends; but how could she, she asked herself, a mere girl, affect this man's estimate of life? She was his pupil, not his teacher.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CRISIS.

But Mr. George Miller had no intention of nursing his wrath in silence. If his suspicions were correct—and his suspicions had almost become convictions—he would have the matter out at once. He was not to be kept dangling after a woman who was secretly in love with somebody else; if that were so, better for every one concerned that the truth should be known and the farce come to an end.

He had not to wait long to bring matters to a crisis. Next day was Sunday—a beautiful, still, brilliant day, with the sunlight lying warm on the grays and purples of rock and heather, on the bare scaurs of the granite mountains, on the light-blue stretches of water around the islands; and, of course, church and chapel were alike unknown in this remote and solitary place. In the perfect silence they could vaguely hear, through the open hatchway of the forecastle, the voice of one of the men reading from a Gaelic Bible to his companions. Mr. Drummond, lying at full length on the deck, partly sheltered from the sun by the shadow of the gig, was deeply immersed in a book, and paid no attention to any thing that was going on. He would not even stir when the others proposed to go on shore: and so Young Miller hauled up the dinghy to the side of the yacht, put the ladies into it, and himself rowed them in to the land.

It was a beautiful place to idle through, on this bright, warm day. A road, skirting the sea, took them through a wilderness of rock and fern, of heather and young birch-trees, of honeysuckle bushes, and rowan-trees scarlet with berries; it led them past mountain-streams that came tumbling down narrow glens into clear brown pools; it took them through woods of young oak and ash; it led them away up the side of a mountain, and there, turning round and looking back, they beheld a marvelous net-work of islands—resembling a raised map—lying in the still blue water, each island having a fringe of yellow sea-weed round its shores. Apparently, the only inhabitants of the place were the wild duck swimming off the nearest point, the invisible curlew that kept whistling and calling each other, and a solitary heron standing among the sea-weed, like the gray ghost of a bird among the rich brown.

George Miller did not notice many of these things; he was too impatiently waiting for a chance of speaking privately with Violet: and at first it seemed as though he never would get that chance, for the girl kept up with Mrs. Warrener and her daughter, who were in front, and of course he could not ask her to linger behind. At last, however, the opportunity occurred. They had to cross a deep glen by means of a wooden bridge that was perhaps eighty or ninety feet above the water below; and here Violet paused for a second or two to cast some pebbles down into the clear pool between the rocks and bushes.

"Violet," said he, rather peremptorily, "I want you to speak frankly with me for a minute or two. Let them go on. I think it is time we had some sort of explanation."

She was vexed and annoyed that she should become the victim of those recurrent interviews whenever she forgot to avoid being alone with him; but she said nothing. She awaited what he had to say with an air of respectful attention.

"You know what I mean," said he, speaking rapidly. "I have as much patience as most men, and I don't wish to bother you; but, after all, it is time we come to some sort of explanation; or let the whole thing come to an end."

He uttered the last words with some vehemence.

"Or let what come to an end?"

"The sort of expectation, or understanding, that some day you will become my wife."

"I am quite willing that that should come to an end."

He had almost expected her to say that; and he was more angry than disappointed. And yet he endeavored to suppress any sign of mortification—partly from pride, partly from the consciousness that an exhibition of temper could avail him but little.

"It is no use, then, my waiting any longer. You have definitely resolved that our relations should cease?"

"I—I have wished that they should cease," she said, in a low voice; "and I thought you knew that—"

"And your reason?"

"I am sure I am very grieved to think that you may be hurt, or offended, or disappointed," she continued, not noticing his question. "And when you said you would rather wait, I thought that was a great pity; but now, since you think it better all this should end—"

"I think it better?" said he, with bitter vehemence. "It is you who think it better; and if you will not tell me your reason, I will tell it to you. You think you have been blinding me? No. I have been looking on at the farce."

She turned her large eyes upon him with a gaze of wonder and inquiry; but he did not fail to observe that her face paled somewhat.

"What do you mean?" she said, slowly.

"Do you think you have blinded me? Haven't I seen the pitiable fashion in which you have become the very slave of that man—echoing his opinions as if he had all the wisdom in the world—toadying and fawning upon him—"

She drew herself up to her full height.

"You do not believe what you say," she said, with a proud smile.

"I do know," he said; and now he had lost control over himself, and his wounded vanity made him talk wildly. "I tell you that all the world can see it—all the world except himself, perhaps, for he is only a baby. And you know what I say is true. Look at me in the face—I dare you look at me in the face—and deny that you love the man."

That was a challenge; and all the wild, rebellious blood in the girl leaped to her heart. To cringe before the accuser—to deny the one highest and holiest feeling that her nature had ever known—that could not be Violet North's first impulse at such a moment. There was a strange, proud light on her pale face as she said,

"And if I do not deny it? I have many things to be ashamed of: not that. No; if I were to die just now, I should think my life had been a happy one, only to have known such a man as a friend."

He was simply thunderstruck. He had seen much, and imagined more; but for this be was not prepared. Then the audacious courage of the girl astounded him. What could this glad, proud light on her face mean, but that her whole being was wrapped up in an earnest, unreasoning devotion?

He knew then that his case was hopeless, and he had sufficient vanity to prompt him to put a good face on it.

"I suppose," said he, with a forced smile, "that, now you have been so frank, there is no more to be said. I wish you had been a little franker some time ago—but that does not matter now. Let us part good friends, Violet."

He held out his hand.

"Are you going away?" she said, in a low voice.

"Yes," he answered, cheerfully. I couldn' tthink of disturbing your domestic peace. Good-bye. If you don't go on at once, Mrs Warrener will be coming back to look for you."

She stood irresolute, but she allowed him to shake hands with her. Then he turned and walked away.

"Mr. Miller!"

He stopped and looked back. She advanced to him, with her eyes bent downward, and a sort of tremble about her lips.

"I wish," she said, in so low a voice that he could scarcely hear her, "to ask your forgiveness for whatever pain I may have caused you. Believe me, I am very sorry; I thought at one time it might have ended differently—"

"All right," said he. "Don't trouble about that. Good-bye, Violet."

He turned once more, and went off down the hill, leaving the girl to rejoin her friends, with the consciousness at her heart that a great event had happened in her life, with what probable consequences she could not at all foresee. She knew that it was better for both that this definite explanation should have been made, and an end put to a hopeless condition of affairs; and yet memory went back over the past two or three years with something of regret, and in her secret heart she was hoping that her now discarded lover would not think too harshly of her in the time to come.

"Where is Mr. Miller, Violet?" asked Mrs. Warrener, when Violet had joined the two who had gone on.

"He has gone back to the yacht."

Her friend regarded her with curious eyes.

"You have been quarreling again," she said.

"No, not at all."

"Well, you will get to the end of these disagreements when you marry, I suppose," said Mrs. Warrener, with a smile. "That is always the way. Young people are always quarreling, because they are jealous, and exacting, and unreasonable; they get to know each other better when they are married."

The girl's cheeks burned red.

"There is no use speaking of that, Mrs. Warrener. Mr. Miller and I will never be married."

The little fair-haired woman laughed: she was not to be deceived—she had observed too much of the ways of young people in love.

"Of course not," she said, in her quiet, shrewd way. "It is always parting for ever and ever—over the wearing of some trinket, or the giving an extra dance to a rival. A solemn farewell for life; and the next day they meet and make it up quite easily. What is it all about, Violet?"

"If you please, dear Mrs. Warrener, I would rather not speak of it," the girl said, gently; and there was an end of the matter.

But as George Miller went down the hill and along the shore toward the bay where the yacht lay, his private thoughts were scarcely so composed and cheerful as his manner of bidding good-bye to Violet had ostensibly been. It was not pleasant for a business-like young man to know that he had been spending two or three years of his life in chasing a rainbow. Then there would be the confession to his friends that he had failed, and the spectacle of this girl whom he had hoped to make his wife publicly declaring that she preferred James Drummond—a man of eight-and-thirty, who would cage her up in a small cottage on a narrow income, and expect her to become a sort of upper housemaid. Not much chance for her now of driving in the Park, which, even as a girl, she had enjoyed.

What fascination, what enchantment, had so perverted her mind? The more he thought of it, the more bitter he became, until he had almost persuaded himself that his rival had been for years trying to cajole the girl's affections, that he might marry the daughter of a rich man. If Mr. Miller had been in his right mind, he would have burst out laughing at this suggestion; but he was not in his right mind; and his jealous fancy brooded over the idea until he was ready to believe that the small yacht out there, lying peacefully in the bay, contained one of the most treacherous, specious, and malicious villians that had ever cursed the world.

He got into the dinghy and rowed out to the *Sea-Pyot.* Mr. Drummond got up, and took the painter from him, and helped him on board.

"Where are the others?" he said.

"Gone on farther than I cared to go."

He sat down again and took to his book; the younger man went below.

In a few minutes Mr. Miller came up to the top of the companion-stairs.

"Can you let me have the knife I lent you last night?" he asked.

"It is in my cabin somewhere. If you want it, I'll go down and get it."

"I would rather have it," was the answer.

So Mr. Drummond followed him down-stairs. What was his surprise to see that Miller had put on the table of the saloon a knapsack which he had brought with him, and that it was partially packed.

"What are you about?" he said, with a stare.

"I mean to leave you now," the young man said, calmly. "I owe you fourteen cartridges; there they are—they are No. 4; but I suppose that won't matter. Can you give me the penknife?"

James Drummond only stared the more.

"What do you mean?"

"What I tell you. I am leaving the yacht."

"But what is the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Where are you going?"

"I shall walk over to Loch Aline, and get some boat there."

"Miller what's the matter with you? You can't walk over to Loch Aline to-day; you don't know the road: I doubt whether there is an inn there."

"Nevertheless, I am going," the younger man said, with a sullen determination.

Most men, in such circumstances, would have told him he might go a deal farther than Loch Aline, for aught they cared; but Mr. Drummond had a kindly feeling for the young man.

"Is it a quarrel with Violet?"

"I thought you would hit it," said the other, with an evident sneer. "I see you have expected it. Well, are you satisfied?"

There was altogether something in Miller's face that James Drummond could not understand. He began to wonder if Miller had discovered a whisky-still on shore and drunk himself mad. But he had not to wait for any further explanation; because the rising passion of the young man broke through his forced composure, and he began pouring forth a torrent of angry accusations. Drummond had inveigled away the girl from her people; he had flattered her school-girl vanity by making a companion of her; knowing that she was practically engaged to one who had her father's sanction, he had treacherously induced her to break her word; and so forth, and so forth. Drummond listened to all this with astonishment, but also with absolute self-control.

"I have a great mind," said he, "to take you up on deck and drop you overboard—that might cure you of your madness. Whoever has put all this stuff into your head?"

"Don't try to deceive me any further!" Miller said, with his lips white with angry excitement. "You have done it well enough already. You knew I was to marry the girl—you knew her father wished it—and yet you set to work to draw her away from me."

"Then, why are you here?" said Drummond. "If that was my design, why did I ask you to join us here? It seems to me that looks more like bringing you two together."

"You can't blind me!" the young man cried, with a scornful laugh. "You knew the mischief was done. You knew the girl was ready to cut off her hand for you, if you asked it. You knew that she gloried in her infatuation—"

"Look here, Miller!" said James Drummond, with a dangerous contraction of the brows, "I believe you are as mad as a March hare. You may talk nonsense about me to your heart's content, but leave Violet out of it. Gracious Heavens, I wonder to hear you, man! You pretend to love the girl; and you may go mad like this with childish surmises. Why not go frankly to her, and learn for yourself that this is mere dreaming and folly—"

"Yes, and then?" exclaimed the younger man. "What then? I find she draws herself up—boasts of her love for you—has not even the shamefacedness to deny it—and then you pretend you know nothing about it! Bah!"

He turned to the knapsack, and continued his packing. For a second or two James Drummond stood absolutely silent.

"Miller, do you know what you said just now?"

There was no answer.

"Was that a lie?"

"You know it was no lie. You have stolen the girl from me. What is the use of having more words about it?"

Drummond went up on deck. The beautiful, fair, still world around him seemed part of a dream; he could have prayed for a bolt of God's lightning to break the awful silence and assure him that he lived. He was in a trance from which he could not escape; he was a dreamer that wrestles with his dream and strives to awake. It was no joy to this man to hear that a young girl had offered him the treasure of her first love. An infinite sadness filled his heart and blinded his eyes; the wild pulsations within his breast seemed so many stabs of remorse; his imagination was stunned by a gloomy sense of the irrevocable.

He did not stir when George Miller came up on deck. He regarded him as if he too were part of this wild, strange dream, as the young man hauled up the dinghy, dropped his knapsack into it, and got in himself.

"Miller!"

"Well?"

"There is some frightful mistake about all this. Wait till they come back."

"No, thank you; good-bye. I have put an address on my gun-case: if you can put it on board a goods-steamer, I shall be obliged to you."

There was a splash of the dipping oars, and the small boat drew away toward the shore.

It was not for an hour after that James Drummond saw any other signs of life along that solitary coast; then three figures came down to the rocks, and a shawl was waved.

He called up two of the men and sent them ashore with the gig. That hour of self-communion seemed to have left his face somewhat worn.

"Where is Mr. Miller?" said Mrs. Warrener. She guessed he had gone, when she saw the dinghy on shore.

"He is gone away—to Loch Aline," said Mr. Drummond, calmly. "I want to speak to Violet by herself about this. Violet, will you come down to the saloon for a minute?"

She followed him down the steps and into the saloon; and he shut the door. She was trembling a little, why, she scarcely knew; nor could she understand the great sadness of his face as he regarded her.

"Violet," he said, "is it true what he says?"

She involuntarily retreated an inch or two, and her fingers were clenched in on the palms of her hands.

"He told you, then?" she said, in a low voice.

"Yes. Let us be frank. It is not true—my child, my child, you must tell me it is not true."

He clasped her hands in his, and for a second she was frightened by the intensity of emotion visible in his face. But her native courage did not forsake her. Her face was white enough; but she said, without a quiver in the low voice,

"And why do you wish me to say that?"

"Don't you know—don't you know, my poor child? Have I kept my secret so well? Don't you know how I have loved you, and hidden away all my love for you—so that I thought you had not even a suspicion of it that would grieve you—all to see you happy as a young girl should be happy, with a young husband, and plenty of friends, and a bright, gay world before her? And now—have I betrayed my trust—but, Violet, it can not be true—you have had a quarrel—"

She had been drinking in every word—her pathetic, anxious face turned up to his, her eyes swimming in tears; and when she seemed fully to comprehend the meaning of his words, he was suddenly interrupted. She uttered a quick, low cry of joy, and hid her face in his bosom. The assurance she had longed for was given.

He put his two hands on the rich folds of dark hair, and put back her head, and looked down into her eyes with a wonderful tenderness and sadness in his look.

"What is done can not be undone; I wish, for your sake, child, it could. I have destroyed your life for you—you, a young girl, just beginning to know how fresh and beautiful the world is—"

"Did I know it was beautiful until you taught me?" she asked, in a low voice. "Have you not shown me what it is to be gentle and noble and unselfish? When I have been in your house I have been happy? outside of it, never. And I thank God for giving me such a friend."

"A friend—if it had only remained at that," he said. "That would have been better for you, Violet."

Her answer was a singular one. She gently released herself from his embrace. She took up his hand, and timidly kissed it.

"You are more than my friend: you are my lord and master," the girl said, with a proud humility; and then she silently opened the door and went out. That interview was something for a man to think of during the rest of his life.

Now during the remainder of that day some shade of melancholy seemed to hang about the spirits of this little party of travelers, which Mrs. Warrener naturally attributed to the fact of Violet having quarreled with her sweetheart. She would have the map examined to see the number of miles; and hoped he would, if he failed to reach the place, have sufficient sense to claim hospitality from some farmer. Amy was inclined to be cross with her friend; for she could not understand why a girl who was so amiably disposed toward those around her should be so cruel to a gentleman who paid her the compliment of asking her to become his wife. On the other hand, Violet was more than ordinarily affectionate toward her former school-companion; and, not content with giving her a couple of lace handkerchiefs which had somehow got among her things, would press on her acceptance the much more valuable box of elaborately cut ivory which contained them.

"Do you know, Violet," the girl remarked, "what mamma said about you the other day?"

"I hope it was something very nice."

"She said it was a good thing for you your ears were fastened to your head."

"Because otherwise I'd lose them?"

"No; because otherwise you'd give them away. I don't know how you manage to keep any thing."

The calm afternoon wore away. They had a quiet dinner in the saloon in the evening; after dinner thay sat up on deck, in the warm night-air, to watch the moonlight rise over the black hills; then by-and-by the ladies went below, and James Drummond was left alone.

Somehow, as he sat there and bethought him of all that had happened during the day, and of the new future that lay before him, a singular and glad change of feeling set in. He would accept the great gift that had been given him, not to rejoice over it as an acquisition, but to cherish it tenderly as a trust. If it did seem so that this girl had placed her future in his hands, he would requite her confidence with an unceasing love and devotion. Nay, he grew bolder than that. He would take it that the highest point in his life, too, had been reached: long after he had hoped for such a thing, the bright, beautiful time of existence had arrived—the year had its spring-time in it—the singing season of the birds was not yet over—there was sweet roses yet unblown, and a woman's heart and eyes to grow proud and glad at his approach. At last—at last! All the happy centuries the world had rolled through seemed but to have led up to this one culminating joy. Now the heart might break—now life might go—since the best the world contained had been pressed to his bosom!

CHAPTER XXIV.

LOVE WENT A-SAILING.

It was impossible for this girl—young as she was, and ignorant as she was of many common experiences—it was simply impossible for her to love where she did not respect and honor. Her whole nature would have risen in revolt against an "infatuation." If by some mishap her heart had got entangled where her head could not approve, she would have crushed the growing sentiment at any cost. And thus it was, after a gallant and loyal endeavor to see the best in George Miller—partly because she retained some trace of her old school-girl interest in him, partly because she dreaded the reproach of having encouraged him to no purpose—she had at last, when driven into a corner, refused him point-blank. Hitherto, indeed, there had not been the remotest chance of her marrying the young man, though neither he nor she was aware of the fact. Considering herself as, in a measure, bound to him, she had done what she could to blind herself to his real nature; but it was of no use. Her clear, shrewd perception was not to be dulled by arguments or reasons addressed by herself to herself: behind the winning and graceful exterior of the young man she saw only poor aims and narrow sympathies, the mean ambitions and contracted prejudices of the hopelessly commonplace. It was with no sense of doing any thing remarkable or noble that this girl of twenty threw away her chances of marriage with a young, rich, and singularly handsome man; preferring the mere friendship of one who was much her senior, who was whimsical, provoking, erratic, and who was very much given to making fun of her. There was no choice at all for her. Young as she was, she was fascinated by the charm of unworldliness about this man's character, by the thousand quick glancing beauties of his mental nature, and by the gentle kindliness and thoughtfulness of his outward acts, In his society she felt that she breathed a freer intellectual atmosphere; life was not all bank-accounts and Bayswater. She was his humble disciple; he, her master; she was content to sit at his feet and listen.

But who can tell of the proud and glad delight with which she knew for the first time that this her wistful worship had met with a far higher reward; that he whom of all men she most regarded with love and admiration had hidden her as the secret treasure of his bosom; that, instead of the clear, cold light of an intellectual friendship—beautiful, indeed, but pale as winter sunshine—there was burning for her a brighter, and warmer, and more beautiful fire on the very hearth-stone of his heart? The joy of it! Her whole being seemed transfused with gratitude; the world was a beautiful and friendly world: what had she done to deserve this great happiness? At first she could scarcely understand it or believe it at all; the shock of the surprise was too great; then, by slow degrees, she tried to realize her position. But not for one moment did any thought of communicating this discovery, or of making any arrangements as to the future, enter into her mind; and the same might be said of him too. To both it was merely a happy consciousness, an understanding between themselves which was too sacred for the outward world to know. Neither wished to proclaim the good fortune that had befallen them; the babblers on the house-tops had enough to interest them. It is very doubtful, indeed, whether either ever thought of looking forward to their marriage: it was enough for him that in the mean time he had a better right than ever to extend a tender, protecting care over the wayward girl; it was occupation for her to study how she could best be grateful for this great happiness by placing her meek service at the feet of her "lord and master."

How rapidly her life seemed to grow and enlarge, minute by minute! She had dawdled over years, with half-developed sentiments and school-girl fancies, and the years seemed no more than hours; now the hours, full of the experiences of a woman, were as many years. She remembered with a kind of dismay that she had at one time regarded Mr. Drummond as an elderly man—as a person to be treated with fear and respect rather than with an intimate confidence. What were the actural facts of the case? She was twenty; he was thirty-eight. Eighteen years made a great difference—thus she argued with herself—on paper; but what difference did they make between him and her? She had grown old, had become a woman, in two or three years; the same period of time had made no difference at all to him. He appeared to discovered the fountain of perpetual youth. Was there any man she knew, young or old, who had such an irresistible gayety of spirits, such a fascinating brilliancy of life? And then, she said to herself, with a proud smile on her lips, if his hair were as white as snow, and his step as feeble as now it was quick and eager, and his eyes clouded over with care, she would none the less be his meek disciple and his faithful friend, considering herself honored among women if only he would accept the utmost treasures of her love and devotion. Such a love as this—and it suffused the whole nature of the girl, her mind as well as her heart—could not well be affected by years.

But all this was of the inner life—a secret sacred to themselves; their outer life was much as usual. He was too fond of mischief, and she was too quick-spirited in resenting it, to allow any unnecessary seriousness to embarrass their outward relations. If their regard for each other was both grave and tender, their manner toward each other was even a trifle more defiant than of yore; until Mrs. Warrener had to intervene and rebuke her brother for so teasing the girl. His plea was that people always quarreled on board ship, especially in a dead calm; and that as soon as the *Sea-Pyot* got out of Loch Sunart, Violet and he would be friends again.

That happened about four o'clock on the Monday.

"Violet," he called down to the cabin, "come on deck! A fine breeze has sprung up; we are getting under way; and we can't bowse the bobstay until you appear!"

When she came on deck, and looked around, there was certainly enough bustle going forward. Captain Jimmy was rather anxious to get out of this land-locked little bay; and as the breeze had sprung up quite suddenly, the resolve to get out to sea was quite as sudden. At last something of quiet prevailed; and the plash of water began to be heard along the side of the *Sea-Pyot.*

"Where do we go now?" she said.

"Away to the north—anywhere—wherever the wind takes us. If the breeze keeps up, we will make Isle Ornsay to-night, and to-morrow morning you will find yourself under the mountains of Skye."

Was it the absence of a certain gloomy-tempered young man, or the new sense of motion and activity in getting away from the still loch, that seemed to arouse the spirits of all on board? Mrs. Warrener fetched up a bottle of whisky, and served out a glass all round to the men, to the celebrate their departure; her brother—humming to himself, in a doleful manner,

"Yo, heave, ho!
Il etait beau,
Le postillon de Lonjumeau!"—

generally stood by to let draw the foresail sheet when the vessel was put about; while Miss Violet and her companion Amy were listening with great interest to some perfectly preposterous stories which Captain Jimmy, who was at the tiller, was telling about the beautiful whisky made by the illicit stills in his youth. There was a good deal of brisk animation on board, indeed; for they were beating down to the mouth of the loch, and the constant tacking in this comparatively narrow channel required some watching and quick work. The skipper took it very easy, however. Sure of his knowledge of the coast, and sure of his men, he did not cease to regale the two young ladies with tales which were of very doubtful authenticity; while his ruddy, good-natured face occasionally broadened into a smile at some profound joke of his own making. It was universally admitted that Loch Sunart was a very beautiful place, but they were not sorry once more to get out to sea.

Now, by the time they had got clear of Loch Sunart out into the mouth of the Sound of Mull, a rich golden glow was over the western sky, and the open Atlantic before them had its blue waves splashed with yellow fire. They were running along swiftly with the wind on the port beam; and the farther out they got to sea, the more wonderful became this world of light and color. Far away at the horizon lay a long, low island, that seemed almost transparent in the burning glow; and then, as they got well round Ardnamurchan, they beheld in the paler north the ghostly mountains of another island, resting on the sea like clouds. Unhappily, however, as the colors in this world of water and sky grew richer and deeper, the wind gradually fell. The sea still rolled in its gold and purple all around them; but the great mainsail occasionally gave an ominous flap; and as the evening wore on, the question was propounded whether they might not be rolling out here all night, unable either to go on or to go back. They did not grumble. Even the worst that might befall them was far from being misery. They sat on the deck and watched the gradual change. An island at the horizon became of a rich dark purple, under a streak of pale salmon-colored sky; above that there was a clear expanse of golden green, fading into cold grays, and terminating in a dark-blue overhead. On the other side of the vessel, a couple of miles off, lay the main-land—a series of dark and mountainous precipices stretching down to the point of Ardnamurchan; and now, as they waited and watched, a pale-yellow radiance appeared over these mountains, and the moon arose into the clear purple vault. The mists on the western horizon disappeared; the sun, a glowing orb of crimson, was sinking behind the sea. They were eager to see the actual dip of this mass of fire; but now a great vessel, with all her sails set, and looking large because of her intense blackness, moved slowly across. She, too, seemed to be at the horizon; perhaps she got more wind farther out; at all events, she moved slowly on through the red glory the sun had left behind him. Now another light appeared, glimmering through the sky-light of the saloon, and the faint tinkling of Duncan's bell summoned them down below.

When they came up on deck again, with shawls and wrappers, all the magic of a summer night at sea was around them. It was of no concern to them that the great sheet of canvas hung loose and limp from gaff to boom: whatever wind there was was dead aft, and they still managed to creep on a bit; for the rest, it would not have much mattered had they been absolutely stationary. When again in their life-time would they be likely to be in such a scene?—the mystery of the sea and the silence of the night around them; the yellow moon filling the cloudless sky and touching here and there the rolling waves; the far heights of the main-land becoming clearer under this wan radiance. It was a night of romance, of wonder and joy, to be forever memorable to at least two of those figures sitting on the white deck. Here they were, cut off from all the world—their home a small craft tossing on the open waters of the Atlantic—their two companions their closest and dearest friends—life had no more to give. The time went by with talk and laughter, with snatches of song, and with a silence sweeter than either, for it was more in harmony with the beauty and the mystery of the night. They watched the stars grow more brilliant as the moon went down toward the south. Far away over the noiseless sea a gleaming point of fire burned under the dark precipices—that was Ardnamurchan light-house. The moon got farther down, until at last it reached the horizon, and then a wonderful sight was seen, as of a ship blazing in the night. Some clouds at the horizon had got before the setting moon—there was a strange, awful, confused glory of yellow fire—and then that faded out, and the world was left with the paler light of millions of stars that shone down on the black islands and the sea.

What this man thought of, during those periods of silence, in the wistful sadness of the night, is not to be put down here, to be read in a railway train, or yawned over after dinner. But sometimes, indeed, his fancy took a more playful turn, and pleased itself by adorning the girl sitting beside him with all sorts of imaginary graces such as were beloved by the old lyrical writers. They had been humming certain of these quaint verses; he, in silence, saw before him the noble and beautiful dames and maidens whom they celebrated; he transferred—merely for amusement's sake, and because he had a purely intellectual delight in his love for her, which was now allowed ample liberty of indulgence—he transferred to her these graces, and excellences, and quaint divergences of character. She was the gay Campaspe who robbed Cupid of his bow and arrows; she was the fair Pamela, matchless in her dignity; she was Cynthia, the forest's queen, at sight of whom the glad birds began to sing; she was Lucasta, Althea, and, perhaps more than all, that tender Chloe "who wished herself young enough for me." Or was she not rather the queenly maiden of the Epithalamion—"

"Now is my love all ready forth to come;
Let all the virgins therefore well await;
And ye, fresh boys, that tend upon her groom,
Prepare yourselves, for he is coming straight:
Set all your things in seemly good array,
Fit for so joyful day;
The joyfulest day that ever sun did see.
Fair sun! show forth thy favorable ray,
And let thy lifeful heat not fervent be
For fear of burning her sunshiny face,
Her beauty to disgrace.
O fairest Phœbus! father of the Muse!
If ever I did honor thee aright,
Or sing the thing that might thy mind delight,
Do not thy servant's simple boon refuse,

But let this day—let this one day—be mine;
Let all the rest be thine!
Then I thy sovereign praises loud will sing,
That all the woods shall answer, and their echo ring."

And as for her—as she sat there in the clear starlight, with her arm round Amy's waist, sometimes looking out on the dark Atlantic, at other times at the ruddy and cheerful glow of the skylight over the saloon? Well, she had less acquaintance than he with these literary celebrities; but if she had wished to choose out one of the songs, snatches of which they had been humming or singing, to convey the deepest feeling of her heart, she knew well which one that would be:

"Bid that heart stay, and it will stay
To honor thy decree;
Or bid it languish quite away
And 't shall do so for thee:
Bid me to weep, and I will weep
While I have eyes to see;
And, having none, yet I will keep
A heart to weep for thee."

It was of no consequence to her that these words are supposed to be addressed to an imperious woman by her humble lover; it was enough for her that they conveyed a perfect expression of her absolute self-surrender, of her love, and respect, and meek humility.

"Bid me despair, and I'll despair,
Under that cypress-tree,
Or bid me die, and I will dare
E'en death, to die for thee!
Thou art my life, my love, my heart,
The very eyes of me—"

Was not this absolutely true? She saw things as he saw them; she was schooling herself to have scarcely an opinion of her own. And when she asked herself, during the stillness of this magical night, whether in sober fact she could die to please this man whom she loved, she did not answer (even in her imagination) with rhetorical phrases, but the proud swelling of her heart was to herself sufficient response.

The dark sea lapped all around the boat; the yellow star of Ardnamurchan light-house was still visible far away in the south; and the point of the topmast, as the vessel rolled, wandered among the gleaming jewels of Cassiopeia, now right overhead. What o'clock was it? They did not care. They chatted, hummed snatches of songs, or sat quiet to listen to one of the sailors, who, on the lookout at the bow, was singing to himself, "Farewell, farewell to Finnorie!"

Strangely enough, too, neither of these two found any constraint or embarrassment in the continual company which is thrust upon one on board a yacht. They had no secrets but the one great secret; and of that they did not care to speak even to each other. What could be the good of talking over this sacred treasure, which the bountiful heavens had so suddenly given them? At this point in their lives they were absolutely content. To exist was happiness; they troubled themselves little about the future; they did not wish to consult in secret over plans; they had an abundant faith in each other; they were independent of the interference or opinion of friends. That was, indeed, a beautiful, happy night, long to be remembered.

But in course of time, as there seemed little likelihood of the *Sea-Pyot* reaching Isle Ornsay before day-break, they were forced to go below, with great regret. Somehow Violet North did not sleep much for the remainder of that night; not, indeed, until after she had heard, in the clear light of the dawn, the loud roar and rattle of the anchor going down. In the stillness and darkness of the little cabin she lay and thought of many things, and these not of the saddest; while the lapping of the waves without, that she could but faintly hear, was a sort of lullaby to her. Were these not strange phrases, too, interfused with that monotonous sound, and coming wandering in among her wistful fancies of all that she was to do to prove her love and gratitude—such phrases as these: "Bid me to live"—"Thou art my life, my love, my heart"—"The very eyes of me."

And then at last, as the first sunbeam of the morning glimmered through the sky-light, and as the vessel ceased from moving, those glad and busy fancies departed one by one, and happiness rocked her heart to sleep.

CHAPTER XXV.

FOREBODINGS.

When she went on deck the following morning, the first shock of the marvelous beauty around her bewildered her for a moment, and in spite of herself tears rushed to her eyes. Over there were the splendid waters of the Sound of Sleat rushing in darkened blue before the fresh, strong breeze of morning; beyond this glowing and dazzling sea stood the great mystic masses of mountains around Loch Hourn, showing wonderful hues of crimson and purple, and blue, soft and pale like some ethereal velvet; close at hand was the neck of land that inclosed the little bay, running out to the light-house point, and on the other side of the bay the bright, warm shores of the island of Skye. The air was sweet with the freshness of the sea; the sunlight flashed on the rushing waves: where could she find in all the world a more splendid panorama of mountains, sea, and sky?

James Drummond was alone on deck. When he took her hand, she meekly waited until he kissed her on the forehead: that was thereafter to be their morning greeting.

"We shall remember these days in the Highlands," he said. "Each of them is worth many years to me."

She looked up; and then for the first time he noticed that her eyelashes were wet.

"I hope we shall not remember them with pain," she said quickly, struck with something in his tone.

"No; why should we? But what has been troubling vou, Violet?"

She began to laugh through her tears.

"Shall I tell you?"

"If it is no very terrible secret."

"This has been troubling me—too much happiness. .And it is to you I owe it all—every thing—my being here, and all that followed."

The extreme self-abnegation of the girl touched him deeply. It was not a thing to be idly argued away with commonplace phrases.

"Come," said he, cheerfully, "put your arm in mine, and we will go for our morning walk, Violet."

They took a turn or two up and down the deck. It would have gladdened the heart of the merest stranger to have seen the brightness of this girl's face.

"And what are you going to write about next?" she asked, humbly.

"Oh, I don't know," he answered. "Holiday-making is our business at present."

"When I was in Canada," she observed, "I copied a great many of papa's letters."

"Yes," he said, not catching her drift.

"I can copy manuscript."

"Yes."

He would not see.

"If—" she said, in desperation—"do you think—that I—that I could be of any use to you when you are writing?—any use at all—"

He stopped; and she cast her eyes down—blushing and embarrassed. With both hands he gently pushed the beautiful hair back from her forehead, and raised her face a bit, and regarded her with a great kindliness, with perhaps a touch of sadness in his look.

"Violet, you must not speak of being of use to me. You talk as if I had done you some favor. God knows it is very different from that: you have altered the whole world for me."

His hand was a little more firmly pressed; that had gladdened her. But all the same she said,

"I will not speak of it, if you do not wish it. But I know that what I am trying to do is right."

So far, well. What she now proceeded to do was scarcely in accordance with these submissive tenets. Amy Warrener came on deck; the two young ladies had a private talk together. Then there was a plunge down into the cabin; after which they came on deck again, and appeared much interested in the fastening of the rope which attached the dinghy to the yacht. At this moment Mrs. Warrener made her appearance, and walked up to the two girls.

"What's this you have, Amy? What is this, Violet? I thought so!"

She dispossessed then of two pretty little packages, each containing a bathing dress.

"So you were going to slip away ashore?"

"Indeed we were; and we are; and why not?" said Violet. boldly, but not at all liking this publicity.

"And you were going away along that wild shore, where there isn't a living thing to be seen—"

"That was why we wanted to go," observed Miss Violet.

"To seek out some place where you don't know the currents and tides! I tell you, Violet, you will be drowned some day, as sure as you are alive now. Haven't you had a lesson already?"

"No."

The fact was that about half a mile from Castle Bandbox, in a little, quiet, sheltered sandy bay on the coast, there was a private bathing-machine, the owners of which had offered a duplicate key to Mr. Drummond for the use of the young ladies. They availed themselves of the privilege only too freely; for Miss Violet would never be deterred by the roughness of the sea, notwithstanding Mrs. Warrener's repeated assurances that she would be drowned. Amy Warrener was a good deal more timid; and it was some story of hers as to an imaginary danger into which Violet had got that was now brought forward to enforce her protest.

It was of no use.

"The sea is quite quiet in here," the young lady remonstrated. "The tide is coming in. We are sure to get a nice quiet place along there round the point."

"Do you wish to drown yourselves?"

"Yes. We are quite tired of life," was the calm answer.

"James," his sister called, "come here and stop these foolish girls."

"Mr. Drummond," said Violet, "would you please help me to get up the dinghy? We can row ashore ourselves."

He had heard the whole dispute: he remained in mute deliberation.

"I have come to the conclusion," he said, slowly, "that there is a great deal to be considered on both sides of this question; but if I endeavored to explain its niceties fully, and hoped in consequence to control the willfulness of a lot of raging women—will you allow me to proceed?—I should resemble a spider that has set its web to catch a fly, and finds it charged by a bull or buffalo. The broad features of the case, however—"

"Will you order them down to their breakfast?"

"Do please haul up the dinghy!"

"—may be described. There is no just and lawful reason why these young ladies should not be allowed to go ashore and bathe."

"Hear, hear!"

"It is true, if they were drowned, it might be looked on as suicide; and we might be charged with being *participes criminis*. At the same time, and in view of the further circumstance that a man, no matter how fast he walks, can not walk away from the centre of the earth—an illustration which might come in handy to those who maintain that anthropomorphism—like the morphological theory in botany, which traces the leaf-form—"

What was this going on forward? The trick was manifest. He had talked the measure out. Overhearing the dispute in the first instance, he had quietly asked Captain Jimmy to get up his men and weigh anchor, the jib being already set; and now the young women were civilly asked whether, in the event of their going ashore, they could swim fast enough to overtake the *Sea-Pyot* as she got up farther sail and betook herself again to the north. There was nothing for it but an unconditional surrender. Tricked, disappointed, and meditating gloomy schemes of revenge, the two young women went below to breakfast. Their enemies had not heard the last of this.

But when they went on deck again, and found the *Sea-Pyot* well out in the bright blue waters, and running free before a brisk southerly wind, the bracing sea-breeze soon blew away their discontent; and all their attention was directed to the singular beauty of the scenes they were passing. Along the distant coast of the main-land the mountains were here and there steeped in a misty blue shadow—just dark enough to show the gleaming white of a sea-gull or a gannet crossing; but on their left the shores of Skye were basking in the warm sunlight, and they were near enough at hand to see the pink of the heather, the dark green of the occasional woods, and the lilac-grey of the rocks by the sea. Very lonely shores indeed these were: here and there the brown sea-weed or the sunlit sand showed a long string of curlew, sea-pyots, and gulls, that rose in dense flocks as the vessel approached, and flew screaming away to some farther bay. And when at last they did see some sign of human life in the presence of a few houses, did not these small hut-like dwellings look only like part of the *debris* which had been washed down by the rains of centuries from the great, shining, silent slopes of the mountains above them?

"Look there," said a certain discursive talker to a select audience of one person; "I wonder if those poor people ever consider how they came to be there. I suppose not: I suppose they consider the great mountains above them were made to support their sheep, and not very well made either, for they are very steep and bare. It is not the worker in the affairs of the world who sees most—it is the idler, the passing spectators. But I have not been idle this morning—"

"What have you done?" asked the audience.

"I have but the finishing touches to my epitaph on the race of publishers."

"But they are not all going to die?" she asked.

"Not all at once," he said, "unfortunately. But you could put this epitaph on the grave-stone of each as he went. And as I was in among the tombs anyway, I got together a few other epitaphs for persons I know."

"How very delightful! What a charming occupation! Have you got them?"

"They are all in Latin. No, I have done an English one for Vernon Harcourt: *He resembled a Virgilian verse—he was six feet long, and sonorous.* Will that do? Look at those mountains now—it isn't forty centuries that are gazing down on you, but forty millions of centuries. And, after all, that is of no moment—the problem of creation is nothing; the great mystery is the existence of any thing. What supports the tortoise? Chemistry can resolve the fabric of the world into elements; but where did these elementary subjects come from? You cannot comprehend any thing without a beginning; and at the same time you can not imagine—but I think we are getting into metapheesics, which may be a sort of telluric fever blown across from the Scotch shore. Look at that cormorant—on the rock—with his wings outspread, as if he were challenging you to have a rifle-shot at him."

"James!" his sister called out, as she appeared at the top of the companion-stairs, clinging with both hands to the hatchway, "surely the sea is rising!"

"Not much; but we have got into the Narrows."

"If she goes on plunging like this, we shall have every thing down below smashed to bits; and I shall be ill—which is worse."

"We may get into sheltered water when we get round Kyle Rea point: the tide and the wind are meeting here—that's what's the matter."

They did indeed get into more sheltered water after they had rounded the point and stood away for the west, but it was a treacherous sort of shelter. The wind came down from the high mountains in sudden gusts and squalls, that demanded all the care and activity of the skipper and his men; one moment the yacht would be lying almost becalmed, the next moment she would be heeled over almost on her beam-ends with a heavy gust from the hills. In the moments of calm, when Mr. Drummond and his companion had less anxiety about keeping a tight grip of the shrouds, they could see that by far the most striking picture they had yet met with lay right in front of them. Nature here seemed self-composed into a landscape. On the left, the outlines of the great mountains of Skye descended and ran out to a narrowing point, on which stood the ruins of an old castle; on the right another promontory ran out, ending in a light-house; between these lay a plain of rough, gray, wind-swept sea; while the sun, shining behind the shadowed point where the ruined castle stood, lighted up the great red granite shoulders of Ben-na-Cailleach and the still more distant peaks—blue, sharp, and jagged—of the Cuchullins. It was a picture that altered every minute, as new bays, peaks, and stretches of sea came into view. When Mrs. Warrener and her daughter were summoned up to look at it, however, there was a defaulter. Miss Amy had considered it more prudent to lie down.

They had some tight work of it to get into Broadford Bay; for, having run along Loch Alsh with the wind on their port beam, and now bringing her head sharply round to the south, they had necessarily the wind almost in their teeth, and it was tearing across the open bay so as to blind them with showers of foam. Once, indeed, in beating up they got so near to certain rocks which are marked with iron perch, that it was only Drummond's confidence in Captain Jimmy's prudence that prevented his calling out to the men to put the vessel about before the skipper gave the order. It was in any case a narrow escape; turbulent as the waves were, they were near enough to see the brown rocks far down in the clear, blue water, and dangerously close to the stern of the boat. However, nothing was said; and after some arduous work, they finally reached what was considered the proper anchorage, and the heavy chain swung out with a roar.

Naturally they were anxious to get on shore—the women more especially; for they had not seen a shop for an unconscionable time, and there might probably be a shop or two in that little cluster of white houses running along the semicircular shores of the bay. But the skipper, having got the sails put to rights, and ordered a couple of the men to lower the gig, somewhat damped the ardor of the party by saying that, if they wished to purchase any provisions, they ought to go to the post-office and ask whether any one in the neighborhood had killed a sheep lately, and that, if they wished for loaf-bread, they would have to see whether the steamer had brought a sufficient supply from Glasgow. However, yachting people like to land on any excuse; and so they merrily set off for the shore—Miss Amy, who had now recovered her equanimity, included.

They were glad to set their foot for the first time on the island of Skye; they were pleased with the look of the white houses, the dark-green line of trees, and the great bulk of Ben-na-Cailleach rising right benind; they were talking, laughing, and joking as the men rowed them into a small quay. Suddenly Mrs. Warrener—in the most innocent fashion possible—indeed, with the best intentions in the world—said,

"Violet, did Mr. Miller say any thing about letting you know how he got on that Sunday?"

The girl was startled by the mere mention of the name. It seemed to her there was some sort of accusation in it; she had been grossly forgetful, unpitying, selfish in the enjoyment of her own happiness.

"N-no," she stammered; and Mrs. Warrener was surprised to notice the confusion visible in the girl's face. She ought, the elder lady considered, to have been pleased. If there had been a lover's quarrel, what more natural than that the suggestion of a possibility of patching it up again should give her pleasure?

"Because I was thinking he would probably write to Broadford or Portree. He knew we were going to both places," said Mrs. Warrener.

Violet North did not seem overjoyed by this intimation. She sat silent, thoughtful, embarrassed; she was immensely relieved when they reached the quay, for then she walked on ahead with Amy, and her friend, imagining that something was wrong, refrained from speaking to her.

The inhabitants of the small village of course came out to their doors to have a look at the strangers, who gave them every opportunity, for there was much loitering in front of the few shop-windows, most of which contained a miscellaneous heap of such things as soap, needles, Glengarry caps, comforters, buttons, biscuits, gunpowder, acidulated drops, and so forth. The objective point of their wanderings, however, was the post-office, which odd little building they discovered imbedded in trees at some little distance from the town. The lady who presided there was the most courteous of persons, who not only gave the strangers all the information they required, but invited them to look at her garden; and, as Miss Violet was surprised to find such a brilliant show of dahlias in this remote spot, nothing would do but that she must carry away a selection of them—a gorgeous bouquet which adorned the saloon of the *Sea-Pyot* for days afterward.

"And now," said Violet to this good lady—for she was too proud to shrink from the task, "would you see if you have any letters for us?"

She went inside and took their cards. There was no letter.

"I have no doubt they got safely back to London," said Violet, calmly.

"He was going straight back to London then," Mrs. Warrener asked.

"I suppose so. He did not tell me."

Mrs. Warrener was grieved. She had a great affection for this girl: and she was sorry to see her being made miserable by a lover's quarrel. Was it not a pity to find two young people, just at the pleasantest time of their lives, making each other wretched for no cause in the world? They could have nothing real to quarrel about. All the circumstances were favorable; all their friends were consistent. Mrs. Warrener resolved to speak to Violet about this matter; and hoped she might be the means of reconciling those two who were obviously destined to become husband and wife.

She soon found an opportunity. They went for a walk along a road leading inland; and now, as the wind had died down, and as the afternoon had become clear, and beautiful, and still, they were in no hurry to get back to the yacht.

"Violet," said the gentle-voiced little woman, linking her arm within that of the girl, "I am really vexed about all this; and I want you to tell me if I can not do something. Now, dear, don't answer in a hurry. I know what a girl is; and I expect you to declare that you don't care for him, and that you would rather never see him again. Every girl says that when she has a quarrel with her sweetheart; and she remains miserable out of pure willfulness. Now, what is the use of your both being wretched, when a word of explanation would clear it all up? Shall I write to him?"

What could see answer? For the first time the peculiar position in which she stood to this kind friend of hers was flashed in on her consciousness, and she stood confronted by the possibility of being charged with deceit. She had never considered that some one else might have a right to that secret which she been cherishing in her own heart. Was it necessary, then, that this strange and new experience of hers should be blazoned abroad to the world, and become the talk of friends and acquaintances?

"Oh, Mrs. Warrener," she said, almost piteously. "It is a mistake—it is all a mistake. There is no quarrel—but indeed I can not tell you just yet—not just yet—"

She would ask Mr. Drummond, she thought; he was her master in all things: she would rather be charged with concealment than run the risk of doing something he might not approve.

"You do not wish me to write to him?" her kind friend said.

"To Mr. Miller? Oh no!"

They walked along in silence, and Violet was grieved and troubled. Now that it was probable her secret would have to be told, how could she defend herself from the charge of being cruel to this young man? It is true she had thought of him often since his leaving her that Sunday, and thought of him with a great pity, and some self-reproach which was but little merited; but she could not conceal from herself that she had experienced a wonderful sense of freedom since his departure, and that her heart had grown light in consequence. Yet it seemed to her selfish that she should be proud and glad in her happiness; while he—the sweetheart of her school-girl days, who had patiently waited on in the hope of getting a favorable answer—was cut adrift, not only from her, but also from his friends.

"I am not to be snubbed," said the fair-haired little woman, cheerfully. "You know, Violet, what intermeddlers get, as a rule; but I must risk that for your sake. We can not have you go through all these beautiful places with a rueful face; and if you won't let me write to Mr. Miller, then I must go and ask James—"

"Oh no!" Violet said, with an eager piteousness in her eyes.

"Come, come, you foolish girl. I mean to speak to him this very moment."

She caught her friend by the arm to stay her.

"Indeed you must not! Do grant me this favor, Mrs. Warrener—only to wait: it is all a mistake, and there is something you must be told—"

"More secrets?"

The girl did not answer.

"Very well, if you wish," Mrs. Warrener said, gently, "I will wait; but mind, you must get rid of your trouble, or else come and ask my help."

In the glow of the evening they turned back from the quiet moor-land ways and made for the shore. They almost felt disappointed that the great range of mountains on their left should shut out the sinking sun: they had grown accustomed to see the sun set over the western seas.

But when they drew near to Broadford, and overlooked the great, broad, still bay, a simultaneous cry of admiration broke from them, for never before, not even in their dreams, had they seen such a magical display of color. Far over on the eastern side of the bay, the great mountains, from base to summit, were one mass of pale, ethereal pink—a world in rose-color, that towered up into a sky of glowing amber. It was bewildering to the eyes; and yet it was exquisitely soft—as soft as the pink reflections of the hills that shone on the smooth bosom of the loch. When they turned fron this palely roseate panorama of mountains to the west, the contrast was most striking. Here the mountains, close at hand, were all in shadow; and before them lay a stretch of moor-land, its dark, rich, intense olive-greens cut asunder by a silver streak of river. As they walked along they could see that these dark western mountains were throwing their shadows right across the bay, until they began to creep up the rose-colored slopes of the distant hills. At length only the tops of the far mountains caught the flame; and now, close by them, as it seemed to be, the golden disk of the summer moon came up behind some trees, and the cold greens of the fields hard by became still more intense. It was a sight never to be forgotten.

The men were waiting at the quay; they pulled out to the yacht as the cold gray twilight came over the hills, and as the yellow moon rose in the south.

"You are tired with your walk, Violet," James Drummond said, regarding her.

"Not at all," she said; "it is pleasant to get a good long walk after being on board for a day or two."

"You will be better pleased to-morrow, when we drive to Torran; you ought to feel like a sailor when he gets into a hansom-cab."

"When shall we go on to Portree?"

"Probably the day after to-morrow. Are you anxious to get on?"

"Oh no; not at all."

Mrs. Warrener heard the question and answer, and drew her own inferences. Portree was the next point at which they would find a post-office.

All that evening Violet had no opportunity of speaking a word with Mr. Drummond alone; for the night was very beautiful, and they all came up after dinner and sat on deck. The water was indeed so still that there were no ripples for the moonlight to catch. The smooth water around them was almost black; but all along the shore a mist lay thick, and that had caught the moonlight. The decks and spars, too, were touched with the ghostly light, contrasting with the orange glow shed by the lamp at the ship's head.

The party was not quite so gay that night as it sometime had been; though Mr. Drummond, all unwitting of any change was in one of his happiest moods. Mrs. Warrener had to confess to herself that if Violet had of late been occasionally out of spirits, her brother seemed to have got to the other extreme. She had never known him remain so long in the very brightest of humors.

When the women retired for the night, Violet allowed Mrs. Warrener and Amy to precede her; then she returned to the desk for a moment, where Mr. Drummond was gathering up the shawls and cushions. He turned quickly; she timidly took his hand.

"Will you do me this favor?" she said, in a low voice. "Will you tell your sister?"

"Yes—certainly—why not?" he answered, quite cheerfully. "I did not know whether you wished it or not; but of course she ought to know, and the sooner the better."

"N-not to night," the girl murmured.

"Not if you do not wish it," he said; and then, more closely regarding her, he saw that she was extremely agitated.

"What is the matter, Violet?"

"I am so afraid," she said, and he knew that her hand was trembling.

"Of what?"

"If we could only have gone on," she said, with a passionate outburst of feeling; "if we could only have gone on as we have been doing these two happy days, what more could have been wished? But now—if every body must know—"

"Every body need not know—" he was beginning to say, when again she interrupted him.

"Your sister will hate me," she said, passionately.

"She will love you more than ever—you will be her only sister. But why all this timorousness at once? Where is the courageous Violet? Come now, let me go down below this minute, and have the whole thing settled. One plunge, and it is all over. Bless my soul, why didn't I speak to her without dragging you into it? It is the simplest matter in the world."

"No—to-morrow," she said, quickly and earnestly, and then she kissed the hand that she still held, and went below. He could not quite understand what all this meant.

As for her, she tried hard, in the silence of the night, to reason herself out of the forebodings which. in spite of herself, kept surging in on her mind. Why should she be afraid of this gentle little woman, who had been so invariably kind to her? What possible motive could any human being have for interfering with her happiness? And then she reproached herself for thinking only of her own happiness; and her fancies went away to another who had a far better reason to complain, and she asked herself again and again, "Was it my fault? Was it my fault?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOCH CORUISK.

He had no fear or embarrassment in breaking this news to his sister when he found her alone in the saloon next morning. He had an absolute faith in her unselfishness; he could not doubt but that she would be eager to take Violet still more closely to her heart.

And yet, as he told her in the twilight of the cabin, he was amazed to see her face grow pale. She retreated a step from him; pain, apprehension, dismay—all were visible in her face and in her frightened eyes.

"Oh, James, is it true?" she said.

The whole story was clear to her; she saw as the end of it only the misery of the two people whom, next to her own daughter, she loved most dearly in the world.

"Well!" said he, astonished. "What is the matter?"

"Oh, James, you don't know what all this is! I can see it. I have dreaded it. And I don't know which is the more to be pitied now, for she is proud—she won't draw back—"

"What do you mean, Sarah? I insist on your speaking more plainly," said he.

"Can not you see the whole story?" she said, rapidly and vehemently, yet with a great pity and tenderness in her eyes. "That poor girl has a quarrel with her sweetheart; he is angry and goes away; she is proud, offended, her dignity is wounded: she resolves to have nothing more to do with him. Then, to revenge herself, she turns to you; and you, you make her believe that the friendly affection you have always shown her will reconcile her to the loss of her lover. And what will be the end of it? Isn't the story told every day? The girl repents when it is too late—when the discarded lover can not be brought back; when she and the man she has married out of spite find themselves chained to each other for life through a cruel mistake."

For a moment he was staggered. The story was terribly life-like—clear, concise, and probable. It was obvious, too, that this gentle little woman was moved by no animus against the girl; she was as anxious for Violet's happiness as his own.

"What you say is very true, Sarah," said he, calmly, "true in many cases; not in this one. I have told you the cause of the quarrel—"

"It is the commonest one in the world," she continued, quickly. "Young men are always jealous: he was doubtless thinking she did not pay him enough attention, and then accused her of paying far more attention to you. That is true enough. Violet has always shown the greatest respect—and I will say affection too—for you. Well, you know how high-spirited the girl is. If he spoke to her like that, would she bear it? She would tell him to go; she would leave him to infer what he likes; and then, in a moment of wounded pride, she turns to you and tries to persuade herself that she loves you well enough to marry you. What can come of it, James? what can come of it? Do you think she has forgotten him? Did you not notice how much embarrassed she was yesterday after I had spoken to her about asking for a letter at the post-office? And I am sure you must see how anxious she is to get to Portree."

It was all terribly consistent and probable—his reason had to admit that; but he was too firm a man to be led into jumping at conclusions.

"Very well, then," he said to his sister. "You may be right. This poor girl may have been driven into an error, as you say; and we may both be in a very painful and mistaken position. If that is so, we must get out of it."

He spoke quite calmly; there was an expression of emotion on his face. The agony was in his heart; for it seemed hard to admit even the possibility that these two glad days that had just passed by had been lighted up by a false light of happiness, and that there were to be no more even of these deceitful joys.

"But what I will take care of is this—that there shall be no misunderstanding in the matter. Violet has stated certain things to me; I can accept a denial of them only from herself. If what you say, or guess at, is true, there is nothing more simple than to get confirmation from the girl herself, and that I will do at once."

She caught his hand.

"My dear brother, don't speak to me as if I were doing you an injury. Do you know how it pains me to have to tell you? Do you think there is any body in the world would rejoice more to see you and our Violet married, if that could be for the happiness of both of you?"

"I know that, Sarah," said he. "And I know all this is kindly meant. But, first, let's see what truth there is in it."

"James, do not go to her," she pleaded. "You don't know what girls are. You would put her on her honor: she would hold by her engagement at any cost. She has had no time to reflect."

"Do you mean me, then, to harbor all these suspicions against the girl, and say no word to her?" he demanded, with some warmth.

"Yes, I do," the little wonan answered, courageously, "*for her sake.* You want to see her happy; I am anxious for the happiness of both of you. And I tell you that is what she would do now, James; she would be ashamed to say she had made a mistake; she would consider herself bound in honor to keep her word to you; very likely her quarrel with Mr. Miller still rankles in her mind. What harm can there be in waiting? Do not drive her into a corner."

Yes—he admitted that what she said was just. Violet's happiness was of more concern to him than his own. If it was true—and of course he did not admit that as yet—that she had blundered into this engagement in a moment of pique, she would be allowed time to repent, and ample opportunities of escape.

The world did not look quite so glad and beautiful to this man when he went up on deck and glanced around at the sea and the hills. His face had something of the old, tired expression it used to have at times in London—a look that Violet, who feared it, had never seen since he had come to the Highlands. And at this moment, too, Violet and her companion Amy appeared—coming on board from the dinghy, in which they had sought out a sheltered nook along the shore for their morning bath. Bright youth and health flushed in the faces of both the girls as they stepped on deck; the morning sunlight that shone on the sea around them was not more brilliant and beautiful than the life and gladness that sparkled in their eyes. Suddenly, however, that careless joy fled from the face of Violet North. She had caught a glimpse of Mr. Drummond; their eyes met, a sense of fear came over her. She longed to go up to him—that was her first impulse—and say "Oh, my kind friend, you are troubled, and I am the cause of your trouble." But she dared not do that; she rather kept away from him, telling herself that the interview between her best of friends and his sister had occurred, and fearing to speculate on the result of it.

After breakfast, as had been arranged the previous day, they went ashore in the gig, walked up to the inn, and found awaiting them there a wagonette, which was to drive them across the island. It was a bright and beautiful day. They got into the vehicle; and away went the two horses inland—past the foot of the great slopes of Ben-na-Cailleach, and through stretches of moorland, until they beheld on their right the massive shoulder and sharp peaks of Blaven's range of Granite, with the black points of the Cuchullins beyond. It ought to have been a pleasant excursion; but it was a somewhat silent one—Mrs. Warrener doing most of the talking, and showing herself more affectionate than ever toward Violet. Mr. Drummond was obviously thinking, and probably of an insoluble problem. Was it not true, he had to admit, that he knew nothing of girl-nature? Might there not be contradictions, opinions, emotions, and so forth, altogether different from those of the women he had known with any degree of intimacy? "You don't know what a girl is," his sister had said to him; and she ought to know.

Once upon a time, when Violet North and George Miller were conversing together, the latter referred to some little social solecism that Mr. Drummond had committed, and remarked that he was old enough to know better.

"Do you know how old he is?" retorted Violet, sharply.

"No, I don't."

"Well, then, I will tell you," she said, speaking very distinctly. "He was born seven-and-thirty years ago. In knowledge of the world and human nature he is fifty; but in knowledge of the world of Hyde Park he is only twenty."

The epigram was clumsily put, but its meaning was clear. Of course it provoked a quarrel; though Heaven only knows why George Miller should have considered himself insulted when Hyde Park was treated with contempt.

At last the wagonette brought them in sight of the open Atlantic—a silver plain shimmering in heat—and they went down the shingly shore to a huge and heavy boat manned by four Highlanders, unkempt, ill-clad, stalwart-looking fellows, who contentedly set out on a pull of forty miles or so, with the most unwieldy oars ever seen by mortals. Two of the men were tall and singularly handsome, their features fine and delicate in outline, and full of power; they spoke what little English they knew with a curiously modulated intonation; and they were very fond of singing songs in chorus—a chorus that consisted of shrill discordant notes in all manner of keys. The singing was a failure. Mr. Drummond began to question them as to the meaning of the songs. As usual, they were ignorant of the acquired faculty of translation. They could give nothing like the equivalent of the Gaelic words: "Ay, it wass the young lass, and she went away," summed up their impression of one song. The next one, that seemed to consist of fifty verses: "Ay, he wass a souldier—and the young lass would be for waiting for him. Ay, it iss a verra fine song, that iss; there iss few of the songs better ass that song; and the music of it iss verra fine whatever." And again: "Ay, that iss a beautiful song, and it wass made by a lady that lived near Kyle Rea. And that song iss all apout—well, it iss apout a young lass—ay—and that young lass—she wass trooned—"

And then they got out and round the long promontory, and found before them the silent Loch Scavaig—not dark and awful in its accustomed shadows, but fair and beautiful and sad. The desolation of this picture, even with the sunlight shining on the blue sea around them, was extreme; for far over this glowing waste of water rose the shadowy bulk of the Cuchullins, in still and sorrowful majesty. There was not a voice to be heard—not even the screaming of a sea-bird, as they rowed into the head of this treacherous loch, now shining fair and calm in the mid-day sun.

They scrambled on the shore, too, and made their way over the rough rocks and grass to the small fresh-water Loch Coruisk—lying still and sombre in the cup of the mighty hills surrounding it. On the right, these hills were in the sunshine, sending their riven, bare, jagged peaks into the far blue of the sky; on the left they were hidden in shadow, mysterious and profound, even in the midst of this summer's day. The women went away down to the shores of the black and sullen lake; James Drummond sat by himself on the rocks, and he seemed to see things as in a dream.

He was alone in this awful solitude—no sight or sound of human beings near; and as he gazed up at the terrible peaks, rising sheer from the gloomy water, he grew to think that they were great dumb creatures, living but immovable, the giants of eternity, abiding forever in solitary self-communion. "They have eyes," he was thinking, "away up in those mystic shadows, and they close but once in a thousand years. When the wild Atlantic frets around the shores, they frown; otherwise they are cold and impassible; they gaze at each other, without curiosity, without intelligence, only with an awful sadness that increases as the centuries slip by, bringing no change. They have seen no human beings; if some small creatures have crept across the neck of land at their base, and disappeared again out at sea, they have paid no heed. Can they speak to each other? No. They listen to the murmur of the Atlantic, but they make no sound in their everlasting repose. When the clouds are whirled against them in the night, and the wild lightning crackles through the dark, and the sea yells around their feet, the awful frown deepens, and it seems as though they would arise from their eternal lethargy and command the elements to be at peace; but no—they pass that by, too, as the strife of a moment; the slow centuries alone affect them, adding to the trouble of the saddened eyes; they have no companionship, not even in the night-time with the mystic and gleaming stars."

"Anthropomorphism," he said to himself, as he rose and seemed to try to shake away certain thoughts. "The projection of the shadow—the exceeding humility of the human being in transferring his own sadness to the Cuchullin hills or the midnight sky!"

Then it suddenly occurred to him—was he really sad? Could it be possible that, amidst all the happiness that had surrounded him and his companions in these beautiful solitudes, a few chance remarks, suggesting what he must regard as at least an improbability, should have such an effect? He would shake off this morbid feeling. There might be certain girl-natures outside the sphere of his sister's experience. And if the worst came to the worst, would he be sad to see Violet—at whatever cost to himself—rescued from a false position, and made happy as a young girl should be happy?

He would not be conquered by the prevailing gloom of this silent and mysterious loch. He made his way down the rocks to the little sandy bay where his companions were seated, and entered into a competition with his niece in the matter of throwing "ducks and drakes." He was quite merry over their luncheon on the rocks. When he got into the boat again, he relieved one of the men—who had recently met with an accident—of his oar, and labored away with that unwieldy instrument for over half an hour. It was about eight o'clock at night when they got back to Broadford.

The weather is abrupt in its change in these parts. Captain Jimmy, who had always professed a profound dislike to Broadford Bay, as a particularly open roadstead in the case of a northerly gale blowing, said that the wind had backed a bit from the south-east to east, and promised to get still farther to the north. Would they like to go on that night to Portree?

"Is there any need—any danger in lying here?"

"Naw, sir," replied the skipper, "there iss no any great deed. But the wind iss good to go up."

"You see you will keep those ladies awake all night—"

"You need not consider us, James," his sister said; and then she added, "You know Violet would much rather go on."

He turned round; Violet was not on deck. He went to the companion-ladder and called down,

"Violet, are you there?"

"Yes."

"We want to know whether you would prefer to remain here for the night, or go on to Portree. The wind is favorable."

She came to the door of the saloon, and answered him, in a lower voice, and with her eyes cast down,

"If it is no inconvenience to any one, I would rather go on to Portree at once."

He went along to his sister, and said that Violet did wish to go on to Portree that night.

"I thought she would," Mrs. Warrener answered, gently.

CHAPTER XXVII.

UNDER THE BLACK CUCHULLINS.

In the deep silence of the night the loud and harsh hauling-up of the anchor sounded ominously, the breeze was rising; the moon, observed from time to time by swift and watery clouds, threw a wan and ghastly light on the sails and the deck, and struck a golden star on the gleaming brass of the compass. When they got outside the bay, they found there was a good sea on; the waves were rushing along before the stiff south-easterly wind; there was a murmur of breakers coming over from the distant and gloomy rocks of Pabba. No one thought of going below; there was a weird excitement in thus hurrying on through the darkness of the night, with the adjacent coasts grown mystical and strange under the frail moonlight. They listened in silence to the plunging and churning of the waves that went hissing away behind the boat; they tried to make out the outlines of the sombre shores they were passing; they watched a strange mist of moonlight gathering round the black peaks of the Cuchullins. The men were obviously on the alert. Once or twice one of them was seen to go up the rigging to the cross-trees to have a lookout for some island or perch invisible from the deck. The skipper did not care to have the tack of the mainsail let down; they were certainly making sufficient way. And so they went swinging on through the night, under the shadows of the black mountains of Skye—the boom straining and creaking, the broad sail flat before the wind, the red and green side-lights rising and dipping as the bow rose and dipped with the hurrying waves. At this rate they would soon get on to Portree.

It was not like that wonderful and magical night when they lay becalmed in the Sound of Sleat, and saw the yellow moon go down behind the sea like a great ship on fire. Then all was laughter, music, and joyous idleness, on the placid waters, under the beautiful stars. Now the black coast of Skye overawed them; the moon that was near to the summits of the Cuchullins was watery and ominous; they were rushing along a breeze that threatened to become half a gale, and there was certainly no room for carelessness or idleness when they got into the narrows of the sombre Sound of Raasay. It was not like the time that had been—the time that was even now beginning to seem remote.

They got into Portree shortly after one in the morning: they could just make out the cottages of the sleeping town, and the rocks and trees adjacent, in the pale and uncertain moonlight. The noise on board did not long disturb the stillness of the place; by-and-by the *Sea-Pyot* was also given over to sleep.

Mr. Drummond was early up next morning; he seemed a trifle preoccupied and restless. His sister was the next to come on deck.

"What an extraordinary morning it is!" she exclaimed. There was a curious watery fog lying about the shore that made objects look at once large, shadowy, and remote.

He took no heed of the remark.

"Sarah," he said, abruptly, "have you said any thing to Violet yet?"

"Not a word," the gentle little woman answered. "I have had no opportunity of speaking with her alone. But if I had, I doubt whether I ought to say any thing. I do not wish to influence the poor girl in any way. So far as I am concerned, she must be free to follow the suggestions of her own heart."

"But she will think it strange; she will imagine you disapprove: I told her I should tell you. And I must speak to her, too, about it. But what can I say?"

He took a step up and down the deck; he was obviously endeavoring to repress many and very varying emotions.

"It is very terrible, Sarah—all this uncertainty, this doubt. In any other case, I would not bear it for a moment. But, as you say, we must not drive the girl into a corner. We must leave her free. And perhaps now—if there should be a letter from Miller—she may decide something—"

He called one of the men to him, and wrote certain words on a card.

"Alec, lad, I want you to go ashore and see if there are any letters for us at the post-office. Get back as soon as you can."

Mrs. Warrener went below to see the breakfast-table laid. She was almost as anxious about this affair as her brother could be. In her secret heart she hoped that there would be a letter from Mr. Miller which would remove all misunderstandings between himself and Violet; that the girl would then see how she had blundered, and make such quick reparation as was possible; and that, after a natural pang or two, they would all return to their old relations, and those two, who were very dear to her, be saved from the consequences of a terrible mistake.

Alec came out again; there were three or four letters, one of them addressed to "Miss Violet North, on board the yacht *Sea-Pyot*, care of the Postmaster, Portree, Island of Skye." Mr. Drummond knew the handwriting: he calmly placed the letter out on the table, at the corner where Violet usually sat.

They were all ready for breakfast when Violet appeared. She went to her accustomed place, took up the letter, glanced at the outside, and quickly put it in her pocket. When she sat down, Mrs. Warrener noticed that she was rather pale.

The girl could not conceal her emotion. Her fingers trembled as she took the cup and saucer offered to her. Some feeble effort of conversation was being made: she did not seem to overhear.

At last she could restrain her anxiety no longer. She murmured something about being excused; took out the letter, and hurriedly glanced over its contents. It was not a long one, apparently; for she suddenly rose, and burst into tears as she left the saloon. A strange silence ensued.

In a minute or two Mrs. Warrener followed.

"What can be the matter, uncle?" said Amy Warrener, innocently.

"Some bad news, I fear," said he; and she was surprised that he could speak of Violet's receiving bad news in so firm and unconcerned a voice.

Then his sister came back.

"James, will you ask one of the men to row Violet ashore? She wants to send off a telegram."

"Certainly," said he; and he went on deck.

A few minutes afterward he was watching a small boat, containing two figures, that was making for the quay. When, at last, it had disappeared altogether into that haze of sunlit mist that lay along the shore, he turned to another of the men and said,

"I should like to have the gig lowered. Can you and Alec pull me up to the head of the loch where those wild ducks are?"

His sister came to him.

"Where are you going, James? You have had no breakfast."

"Yes, thank you," he said, gently, and his face looked a trifle careworn and tired—that was all. "I have had enough. They say there are plenty of wild ducks up here."

"Oh, James—" she was beginning to say; but tears swelled up in her eyes, and she could not speak. She saw him fetch his gun, get into the gig, and take the tiller-ropes. She knew that the sorest heart in England that day was in that boat.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CROSS-CURRENTS.

The mischief now wrought by this tender-hearted little woman, in all innocence, and with the best intentions in the world, could not have been done half so thoroughly by the most artful and ingenious plotter that ever appeared in a melodrama. The reason was simple. She had a clear, convincing, unwavering belief in her own reading of the relations existing between her brother and Violet, and between Violet and George Miller; and while this belief was likely to impress in some measure the people around her—mental magnetism being a far more sure thing than animal magnetism—it was a complete safeguard against her making any mistake in the *role* she was unconsciously playing. She had no secret plot to work at. Her intense, unselfish regard for the happiness of those two near her was too obvious to be questioned.

Then look at the position in which she stood for the effectual carrying-out of this unintentional mischief. Any other person coming to James Drummond with the same story would certainly have been met with distrust, and might probably have been met with ridicule; but she was Violet's most intimate friend, the confidante of the girl for years back. Then she was a woman, versed in the mysteries of the feminine heart; and it was with the most open sincerity that she had assured him he knew nothing of girl nature. When she appealed to him, for Violet's sake to give the girl free opportunity to get out of the terrible position in which a blunder had placed her, what could he answer? If her heart were really beginning to look longingly back toward the young man who had left her in a fit of anger, surely it was better she should declare the truth, and go. But he had too noble a regard for the girl to challenge her, to drive her into a corner, and claim from her a denial of these lingering regrets, as a more hasty or a more selfish man would have done. She should have her free choice.

Now we come to Violet herself; and here Mrs. Warrener's mischievous work was far more easy. She had only induced her brother to remain aloof—to give Violet time—to watch and judge for himself; while she had been successful in bringing back the old, sad look to his eyes. But with Violet the case was different. The girl was proud, high-spirited, impetuous; while love in any case is quick to imagine and magnify danger. When Violet came on board again, after having sent off her telegram, Mrs. Warrener was on deck awaiting her. She took the girl's hand in hers and drew her a bit aside, so that she should not be overheard; then she said, in a very gentle and kindly voice,

"You are troubled about something, Violet. Can I help you? If you do not wish to tell me what it is, I shall not be offended with you; but you know I might be able to help you; and you know how anxious we all are to see you cheerful, and well, and happy."

The girl was looking down, her face burning; she was not like the bright, audacious Violet of old.

"I have no right to be cheerful and happy," she said, in a low voice. "I have acted badly—I have given great pain to others—"

"But all that may be mended," said Mrs. Warrener, eagerly; for was not every word uttered by the girl further confirmation of her, Mrs. Warrener's, belief? "Indeed, no great harm has been done, Violet—it will be made all right again, dear. May I guess that that telegram was sent to Mr. Miller? Yes? Then you will be friends again, and your old relations will be established again—"

"Oh no," the girl said, "that is impossible—that is quite impossible. But I am so sorry—"

"Violet," said her friend, with a smile, for she saw her way clear to making every body happy, "I am going to tell you a secret. My brother spoke to me yesterday about what had happened between you and him—do you look afraid, Violet, and afraid of me? If it were only possible—if I could only have you for my sister—do you think I would not welcome you with open arms? You are one of our family already, Violet; if this other relation had been possible, I should have been more delighted than I can tell you."

"Yes," said the girl, in a bewildered way: she did not quite understand.

"But now I am so anxious to see you out of your trouble, Violet," said the good-natured little woman, with increasing confidence, "that I must speak frankly to you. You must not imagine that you are bound to my brother. If it would secure your happiness, I know he would never in this world say another word about what has happened; and you must not imagine, either, that you would be doing him so great an injury; for, after all, the affection he has for you is what he always had for you—even when he was glad to see you were about to marry Mr. Miller, he would be quite as pleased and glad too that both he and you were not the victims of a mistake. You know, Violet, the kind of affection with which a man of his years regards a young girl. It is very unselfish. If he thought you stood in need of some one to aid and guide you, he would be prepared to marry you, when that was suggested to him; and if he thought it better for you to marry some one with an older claim on you, he would give you up frankly, and still regard you with the same affection. Do you see all that, Violet?"

Was all this terrible thing true? Was it true that he only regarded her with that friendly affection of which his sister spoke? Then she remembered, with a great shame and dread, the circumstances that had led to this engagement. Mr. Drummond had almost been challenged to return her affection. A confession of her love for him had been carried to him; her good, kind friend had responded; and now his own sister was talking of this response as a mistake, from the effects of which all the persons concerned were to be rescued.

Violet North had not James Drummond's patient strength and reticence of character; she was quick, proud-spirited, prone to act on the first impulse. Her girlish sense of dignity was touched: she would not have it said that any man had, through compassion for her friendless position, been led into exaggerating his regard for her and offering her marriage. On the other hand, her deep affection for him was quite as powerful with her as her quick sense of honor: would she have the man she loved drawn into an engagement that he might regret all the years of his life?

These fancies, fears, and resolves darted through her mind, as she stood there for a second or two, quite silent.

"He has asked you to tell me all this?" she said, nerving herself to speak calmly.

"Oh no!" Mrs. Warrener exclaimed, with honest eagerness; "not a word of it—not a single word of it. You know how kind, how utterley regardless of himself, my brother is. So long as he imagines that you might consider a marriage between you and him as likely to promote your happiness, all the tortures in the world would not get him to say any thing against it. If you went to him just now, he would declare that he was rejoiced at the prospect—"

"Would that be fair? would that be honest?" the girl said, indignantly, and not without some sudden and sad look back to certain words which she had believed all too fully when she heard them.

"It is so easy to put in a little exaggeration, when one is anxious for another person's happiness," Mrs. Warrener said, with a smile.

"And if I go to him now and speak to him about this matter, he will continue to deceive me—for my good?" asked the girl, somewhat proudly.

"You must not call it deception," said Mrs. Warrener, gently. "If I were you, I would look at the motive for it, and call it kindness."

"Then what am I to do?" Violet said, standing erect. "Break off the engagement at once, and get back to London? The steamer comes in here to-morrow. My father is in London at present."

Her friend regarded her curiously. Was she acting? Or was she really vexed and disappointed—with the mild disappointment of a girl who, having fancied she had two lovers, finds she has only one?

"No, no, Violet, you must not do any thing rash," she said, quietly. "If I have shown you how matters are likely to come all right in the end, it was not with the wish of advising you to do any thing at once. You can afford to wait—indeed I suppose you must wait now, unless you think there is the least chance of Mr. Miller altering his mind and coming back to the Highlands?"

The suggestion was thrown out at random; and yet Mrs. Warrener would not have been surprised to hear that he was coming back.

"I don't know what Mr. Miller's intentions are," said Violet, with some haughtiness; "but if he comes back here, I must leave."

Mrs. Warrener did not like to smile; and yet the girl was so charmingly simple. Clearly, she had not quite forgiven him just yet; she was inclined to stand on her dignity; her compunction of the morning, awakened by reading his letter, was only now disappearing.

"Well, Violet, let us say no more about this at present. Come down below and have some breakfast."

"Thank you, I don't care about any just now."

"Well," said Mrs. Warrener, with a laugh, "we are having a pretty lot of trouble over nothing. But I can not allow you all to act like spoiled children. Here is James, too, gone off without taking any breakfast. Now, if you won't have any, what I propose is this: let us at once put luncheon for the whole party in the dinghy, and we can all go away up the loch in search of him. Will that do?"

Violet considered that Mr. Drummond must have been eager to get the wild duck when he left without his breakfast; but she willingly consented to aid in the provisioning of the dinghy, and in due course of time that handy little boat started on a voyage of discovery. It ought to have been a pleasant excursion. Though a curious sort of watery vapor hung round certain portions of the shore, out here the sun had drunk up the fog, and the blue sea sparkled in the light. Behind that veil of mist too, they could see something of the white houses of Portree, and the outjutting rocks covered with trees and bushes. There was a pleasant scent of seaweed in the morning air; and all around them there was a delicious, dreamy silence and quiet.

But when, after a good long pull, they got up toward the head of the loch, things were rapidly changed. A sort of gray, transparent darkness seemed to fall around them. They had an impression that the sun was still shining, but they could not quite tell where he was, and there was no light on the still water. They could see objects at a considerable distance, but these objects were vague and confused.

A large bird went whirring by, some twenty yards from the boat. The women were startled by the noise it made.

"It iss a skart, and a big skart too," said one of the two sailors.

Some half a dozen birds, smaller, apparently, and yet of considerable size, went whizzing past overhead.

"That was only pyots," said the man; but, all the same, he seemed to imagine that Mr. Drummond had missed a chance.

There were indeed plenty of birds about; the fact being that at this moment Mr. Drummond, having explored a distant creek of the loch, was now coming over to where the dinghy was, and these birds he had driven on before him. Away in the distance they heard the faint crack of a shot; by-and-by they descried the gig coming slowly through the strange, transparent mist. At the same moment they discovered that they were aground.

But what was this approaching them?—a tall figure that seemed to take diverse shapes as the luminous fog floated this way and that. Although they were aground on the sand, they could see nothing but water as far as their sight could reach; and this tall figure was coming to them through the water. Their eyes were blinded with the humid mist; they could not see distinctly; but at one moment they caught sight of a pink flash of flame, and afterward there was a loud report that was echoed by all the hills around. Then the fog around them seemed to be filled with birds, screaming and calling, and flying so near to the dinghy that it was apparent they, too, were bewildered. More pink flashes; more loud crashes of noise; that mystic figure going here and there with a sound of splashing water wherever he went. Then, by-and-by, he came nearer; and they perceived that he was slowly wading through the sea, and carrying in his hand a number of birds.

"Oh, James!" his sister cried, "have you been in the water all this time?"

"And not for nothing," he said, holding up five curlew, which he deposited in the bow of the dinghy. "The birds are confused by the fog; I could have shot twenty dozen of sea-pyots."

"You have not even your shooting-boots and gaiters on," his anxious sister said.

"I began by taking off my shoes and socks altogether," he answered; "but these flats of sand are filled with small flounders, and it is a most horrid sensation to find them shooting away from beneath your feet. I had to put on my shoes again. But what has brought you up here?"

He was talking quite cheerfully. Violet, who dared not look at him, felt every tone of his voice sink into her heart: it was the old friendly voice—and it spoke of nothing but friendship.

The question had been addressed to her, as she happened to be nearest him; and she started.

"Oh," she said, with sudden embarrassment, "we brought you some lunch."

"Why, you are fast aground," he said—and there was certainly no embarrassment in his speech to her—he seemed to have recovered all his ordinary equanimity and brightness. "And so is the gig, back there. If you are going to have luncheon now, I must wade back to the gig, and tell the men to come along when the tide floats them."

"Uncle," said a young lady in the boat, looking over at the beautiful clear water and the fine sand, "would you let me wade over to the gig?"

"For shame, child!" her mother said.

There was another young lady in the boat who, in other circumstances, would have dearly liked to have gone on a wading expedition; but she was thinking of different matters at the moment.

Eventually it was decided that there was no need to apprise the occupants of the gig, for the fog was gradually clearing, and by-and-by they would be able to make signs. The humble store of provisions was opened. Mr. Drummond, having wrung his trousers as much as possible, got in at the bow, and sat there, so as not to damage the ladies' dresses. It was a sufficiently cheerful meal. An outsider would have imagined that these people were just as they had been two days before.

Was it an excited fancy that made her think she could detect a somewhat forced tone in his cheerfulness? Was he striving to make it appear to her that he was quite happy and contented? Certainly, he was as vivacious, rapid, and ingenious in his talk as ever—starting away from a letter which he had received that morning, in which his correspondent spoke of his having accompanied a great man of letters

—remarkable alike for his personal force of character and for the Northern ruggedness and earnestness of his writings—to the British Museum to look at the Elgin Marbles. The fact that this celebrated person could see nothing interesting or impressive in these remains of Greek art was to this preacher—sitting on the bow of the dinghy, with his wet shoes placed on a thwart, and a plate supported on his knees—a fruitful text. They had a lecture on the fundamental antagonism between the Northern mind, stern, realistic, eagerly seeking after moral value and individual portraiture, and the soft, bland imagination of the South, placing its ideal types in an atmosphere of perpetual repose. In the intervals of this meal of cold beef and bread they heard the lecturer declare his own enthusiastic preference for the North—how the individual character in a portrait by Rembrandt had more fascination for him than the blank faces of a hundred Apollos—how that the highest excellence of art was that which most keenly touched the highest emotions of the human being—how that the ballad of "Helen of Kirkconnell" was worth twenty dozen of "Iliads"—how that the mystery of the Northern imagination that made the common objects of the world around us strange and wonderful— But at this point the lecture was broken off, for a certain young lady handed her uncle a tumbler of ale over the shoulder of one of the men. Resuming, the lecturer declared that the grandeur of a mountain could not be understood unless there were mists floating about it; and that he had always had a profound affection for the sailor of the anecdote-books who, coming on deck in the English Channel, on a voyage homeward from the Mediterranean, and finding himself surrounded with driving sleet, and fog, and east winds, remarked, "Ha! this is weather as is weather; none o' your hanged blue skies!" Then he spoke of the reverence which men in all ages had paid to the artist, who was to them the nearest approach to the Creator: he could not make his creations eternal, but at least he could give them some little permanence, and rescue from destruction and forgetfulness the passing glory of a sunset, the tender beauty of a moonlight night, or the happy laughter of a girl's face—

"Is this part of your new book, uncle?" said the young lady.

"No," he continued, calmly. "My new book will be devoted to giving lessons in good manners to impertinent young misses who ought to be at school."

"And when will it be published?"

"I am glad to see you are anxiously awaiting it. It will be out as soon as I have started the magazine that is to review it favorably."

"Will you let me write the review?" Mrs. Warrener asked.

"But this is a great project," he said, seriously, to his sister. "I can see a large fortune looming in the distance. I calculate that there are at least forty thousand people in this country continually writing books, tracts, and pamphlets that are so confoundedly foolish that no review will notice them. Very well. My *Universal Review* will set to work to praise every one of these books and pamphlets; then I shall have forty thousand people declaring that the *Universal Review* is the greatest and wisest journal in the world; and with a circulation of forty thousand at sixpence a number, I have no need to appeal to the public at large at all. Do you see?"

"And will you do all the praising yourself?" she meekly asked.

"Not a line of it. I patent the invention, but I don't drive the engine. I shall get an amiable young curate; and I will put it to him that, as there is a great deal of unnecessary severity and cruel wrong-doing in reviewing, he is called upon to restore the proper balance of things by introducing a large measure of charity and benevolence. He will do a generous work; and I shall have my forty thousand sixpences. Even should my success encourage rivals—"

"*There iss a skart out there, sir!*" called out Alec, in a low, eager voice, for the gig had been by this time paddled up to the dinghy.

"Where?"

"Out there, sir—sweemen in the watter," was the quick answer; for the young sailor was far more anxious to get after the birds than the sportsman of this little party.

Far out among the blue ripples—almost in the middle of bay—they could descry a black object floating on the sea. Now Mrs. Warrener had for some time back declared her intention of having one of those huge black-green skarts stuffed and put up in the hall of the cottage in Camberwell Grove, and she had repeatedly besought her brother to shoot one for her. His efforts had so far been unsuccessful. The skart is a quick diver, a rapid flier, and, although his body is big enough as a target, his thick, strong plumage is not easily pierced by ordinary shot. Besides, Mr. Drummond was generally too intent on bagging curlew, which were good for the yacht's larder, to care to startle the neighborhood by firing random shots at stray cormorants.

On this occasion, they resolved to adopt a little bit of strategy. The dinghy was sent round the curve of the shore, to get to seaward of the bird, so that it was not likely to rise when the way was blocked; while Mr. Drummond, getting into the gig, was pulled away along the other shore. By-and-by the bird was between the two boats—swimming about, and occasionally diving, but showing no sign of fear. When, however, the gig was slowly paddled out toward it, it became a trifle more alarmed. It was evidently swimming away from them, and making for the other side of the loch. But there was the dinghy; and now it became a question whether the dark-green bird, with its long neck and ungainly body, would boldly adventure a flight past either of the boats, or dive.

Mr. Drummond was up in the bow of the gig, his breechloader kept out of sight. When they had got to within about sixty yards of the skart, he stealthily put down his hand, but almost at the same moment the bird made a plunge forward and disappeared.

"Now, my lads, pull away!" he called out. "He'll rise close to us—"

The bang of the gun interrupted the speech; he had fired a snap-shot at the skart, which had come up some forty yards off on their left. But the shot had merely struck the water; for the bird, finding itself close to its pursuers, had immediately dived again.

They pulled quickly to the spot, and waited about, but the skart was evidently taking a good swim down below. The difficulty of getting a shot at him, moreover, was enhanced by the chances of his rising somewhere in a line with the dinghy, in which case it would be impossible to fire, although the smaller boat was a long way off.

"There he is, sir!"

The big black object was visible for just a moment some twenty yards astern; and again a charge of shot went crashing down on the water.

"You will hit him that time, sir," called out the eager Alec. "Ay, we will hef him this time; he will no go far now."

But when they next saw this Jack-in-the-box, after the lapse of a couple of minutes or so, he was a great distance away, and the two boats had to begin the chase anew. Suffice it to say, that, after about three-quarters of an hour's waiting about, and a great deal of snap-firing, the skart was at last stretched on the water; and when he was dragged dripping into the boat, he was found to be an unusually large specimen, with especially fine, thick, glossy plumage. The men declared that they would be "ferra glad to hef the skart to eat, and Alec he wass ferry cleffer at the skinning, and the skin it could be stuffed ferry well whatever."

"No, thank you," said Mr. Drummond to them. "I know of old what the cooking of a skart does to a yacht; you wouldn't get the smell out of the forecastle for a week. You may have a couple of these curlew, if you like; but no skart, if you please."

It is easily to be understood that there was no objection to this course—Alec being of opinion that a curfew was "just as good as a faisant"—and so in great contentment they rowed back through the beautiful bright afternoon toward the yacht. Portree looked very picturesque as they approached it, Over its shadowed rocks and trees stretched a silver-gray sky, mottled with millions of small, faintly yellow clouds—a clear—bright ethereal sunset; its white houses, its dark-green firs and bushes and boats, were distinctly seen in the cold twilight underneath, while a pale-blue smoke from the chimneys arose to the glowing sky overhead.

When Violet got on board, she went down to her little cabin, and took out from her pocket the letter which had so deeply moved her in the morning. She read it again—this time with less emotion. So far, indeed, from the letter making any appeal to her feelings, it was studiously cold; it was this very coldness that had startled and pained her—that had brought with it an accusation which she could not altogether repel. She felt she deserved to have this former friend of hers address her as "Dear Miss North." She had been thoughtless in allowing him to nourish illusions for so long a time; she ought not to have listened to his prayers for delay and further consideration; she had been selfishly forgetful of his pain and disappointment in the enjoyment of her own newly-found happiness. All this suddenly occurred to her on her first reading of this letter; and she knew that she could make no reparation.

But on one point her pride was touched. The writer of this cold, formal, business-like letter went on to say that he considered he was bound to inform Sir Acton North of what had occurred in so far as it affected him, Mr. Miller. That is to say, the young man, having had his suit approved by Violet's father, would go and inform him that these relations were now at an end. He wished to know, therefore, whether Miss North would prefer his confining his statement to that one point, or whether he was to tell the whole story.

Violet could not brook for a moment what she regarded as a sort of insinuation. Thus it was she had demanded to be put on shore immediately; and at the post-office she had telegraphed as follows: "I am deeply sorry if you are pained. As regards my father, you may tell him what you please."

And now, as she still held George Miller's letter in her hand, and looked at it without seeing a word in it, she was asking herself whether the young man would really tell her father the whole story. That morning she had no reason to dread such a revelation; she had, indeed, intended to sit down and write to her father a good deal more than George Miller knew; she had even settled in her own mind how she would begin the letter—"My dear papa, I am the very proudest and happiest woman in the whole world. At last I know what it is to have one's admiration and love go hand-in-hand—"

But since that morning something strange had occurred. She did not quite know what it was; but it had greatly changed the world for her. Her mind was filled with dim forebodings, and even with a dull sense of pain, that seemed to blur and confuse her perceptions of the things around her.

Then, with a sudden and resolute effort of will, she roused herself. She would go frankly and courageously to Mr. Drummond, and demand to know the worst. If this gentlest and truest of all her friends was pained on her account—if her presence there caused him the least embarrassment in the world—if, to please her, he was acting a part of forced cheerfulness—she would proudly and gladly set him free. If it was true that he had nothing to offer her but that constant and tender affection he had shown her ever since he had known her as a school-girl and the companion of his niece, she would meekly and gratefully accept that, and let the dream of her life go with a sigh.

She could not go to him. The red blood tingled in her cheek as she thought of the manner in which he might meet her question. Could a girl so far demean herself as to ask for love; could she more especially, who knew the great possibilities of unselfishness in this man's nature, run the risk of calling on him to sacrifice himself for her happiness—the happiness of a mere school-girl? No, she was too proud for that. She would wait to see whether it was true that they had blundered into a false position; if that were so, she would find some means of freeing them both. What mattered a school-girl's happiness, she again asked herself? The sun would rise all the same over these Skye hills to-morrow, next year, fifty years hence. Who was to care about her and the disappointment of her girlish dreams?

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

When, on that beautiful morning at Isle Ornsay, they first saw the glowing wonders of Skye and the Sound of Sleat, they were full of a new enthusiasm, and eager to go still farther on in their explorations. Supposing that they should get to Portree—this was the subject of general talk and speculation—why should they not make a bold dash across the Minch to far Stornoway and the solitudes of the Outer Hebrides? With a fair wind, and provided that the Greater Minch was not rolling mountains high before a north-easterly gale, they might do the sixty-five miles between Portree and the Lewis in a day. They would adventure it. They would visit that vast "peat floating in the Atlantic." They would touch the "ultima Thule" of Boethius; and was there not some talk, too, of letters of introduction to a mysterious island potentate who had abundant salmon-fishing, and whose daughter had a yacht, the marvel of these distant isles?

But now, as they lay in Portree, the last anchorage between Skye and Lewis, they did not seem quite so enthusiastic about this project. Mrs. Warrener considered that, before attempting a voyage round the Outer Hebrides, they should get back to Castle Bandbox and get a sufficient supply of all sorts of necessaries. Her daughter had been making private and anxious inquiries of Captain Jimmy, who had frightened her with the possibility of their being becalmed out in the middle of the Minch—as he had been the summer before—for three days and nights, with the heavy Atlantic swell rolling the *Sea-Pyot* about in a fashion which a landswoman would not readily forget. All these and other considerations were being discussed at breakfast, Violet alone being silent and *distraite*. At last, Mr. Drummond, deeming that his guest had the best right to decide, frankly asked her what she would rather do.

Now the girl had lain awake nearly the whole night, and she was nervous, troubled, almost in an hysterical state. She had been thinking of that beautiful, enthusiastic time at Isle Ornsay; and somehow, when he put this question suddenly to her, the difference between that time and this so overcame her that her eyes filled with tears, and she could not speak. She endeavored to escape unperceived; but his question had drawn attention to her. When she quietly left the saloon, Mrs. Warrener followed; her daughter remained, convinced that there was something behind all this that she did not understand.

Then she saw her uncle rise, and he was obviously very much agitated. All the generous kindliness of the man's nature revolted against the wretchedness which this girl was too clearly suffering; and could he any longer doubt that what his sister had told him was true? The girl was miserable; she should not remain miserable through him.

He went on deck, where the two women were walking up and down.

"Sarah," he said, with great apparent firmness and calmness, "I want to speak to Violet for a moment."

His sister withdrew, and then he said, in the same tone,

"I can not let this continue, Violet. We have made a mistake. Let us look on what has happened during these past few days as never having happened at all, and try to forget it."

She heard. It was all a mistake, then. That beautiful past was only a dream.

At this moment—she remembered it long after with a strange wonder—she looked up to his face with a frank and kindly smile.

"Yes," she said, lightly, "we have made a mistake. Is it not fortunate that we have found out so soon—before there is any harm done? Now we can be as we were before: and it is—it is quite fortunate there is no harm done. Shall we go down now? I must apologize to them, and promise to make no more scenes."

She seemed quite pleased, and she smiled; but he noticed that the small white hand which she placed on the top of the companion-stairs to steady her descent trembled so violently that he thought she must have fallen. He could not understand all this; but the girl had an excitable temperament: perhaps the events of the last few days had been a little too much for her nerves.

She was quite mirthful during breakfast. She said she did not care whether they went on to Stornoway or back to Castle Bandbox, so long as they lived in this curious little floating house, with its miscellaneous groceries, and expedients in cooking, and makeshifts, and mishaps. On the whole, she thought they had better go back and fit out for the longer trip. At present, at all events, they could not go on to Stornoway at all; for there was scarcely any wind.

Mrs. Warrener was delighted to see the girl once more bright and cheerful: she knew that the desired explanation had at length been made, and happier days were in store for all of them. So she, too, gave in her vote for returning; not without the secret hope that they might find George Miller awaiting them at Castle Bandbox.

When they went on deck, accordingly, they found the great mainsail hanging loose in the sunlight, though there was scarcely enough wind to make the canvas flap, while the men were hoisting the gaff-topsail. Far up in the blue, the small red pennon at the topmast gleamed like a tongue of flame. The water was almost smooth around them, showing accurate reflections of the motionless white clouds, and of the dusky mountains over there that were mostly in shadow. In the south, and behind the olives and browns of these great shoulders of rock, stood the sharply serrated line of the Cuchullins, the peaks of a pale transparent blue.

They managed to get out of the harbor, and, once fairly in the open, they saw how impossible it would have been to have attempted Stornoway at this time. Away out there, in the direction of the Minch, the sea was like glass; here at hand there was a slight breeze that just kept the boat going, but that breeze was from the north-east. Miss Amy, for one, was glad they were not going to risk being becalmed for a few days on the long Atlantic swell.

When, however, they had crept down to the Sound of Raasay, the slight breeze that had carried them so far died off altogether; and they were motionless in a dead calm. The sea was a perfect mirror, in which that long panorama of mountains—faint and mystical in the heat of the sun—was reflected with a surprising exactness. There was neither a house nor a ship within sight. They seemed absolutely alone in a world of glassy water, of silent hills, and motionless skies.

In ordinary circumstances this would have been a time for novel-reading, card-playing, sewing, smoking, and so on—the various amusements and occupations possible on board ship; but curiously enough they did not seem to be much in want of any such means of passing the time. James Drummond kept pacing up and down the deck—like a caged hyena, said his sister, who was in the best of spirits—answering the questions or remarks addressed to him rather absently. Violet was perfectly silent, and sat apart, looking out to sea. Her accustomed companion, seeing the girl looked rather fatigued and wearied, tried to induce her to join in some sport or other, but without avail.

At this moment, indeed, the very number of conflicting emotions pressing in on the girl prevented her realizing to the utmost her desolation and misery. She had so many things to think of ; so many recollections to recall ; so many quick, contrary, puzzling interpretations to consider of all this that had happened. She was a trifle bewildered, perhaps, so that the keen edge of her wretchedness was blunted. For one moment, for example, she would think with some slight surprise of the readiness with which he had thrown up this engagement ; the next she would accuse herself of selfishness in expecting that he would continue to act a lie for her sake. Was it not better for both, indeed, that the truth should be known ? There was no harm done, she had assured him. In a short time all would be as it had been.

At the same time, she felt very lonely. She had no mother. There were certain things about which she did not care to speak even to this kind friend who had tried to be as good as a mother to her.

"Violet," said the young girl near her, coming up to her and putting her arm round her neck, "you will blind your eyes if you look so constantly at the sea. I wish you would come and persuade Captain Jimmy to make us some of those rope-quoits you were speaking of—come !"

"No, thank you, dear," she said, rising ; "I am going down to write a letter."

"And where do you mean to post it ?" said Amy, with a laugh. "In a bottle ?"

"I only want to write it : we can post it at the first place we land."

"Don't be too curious, Amy," said Mrs. Warrener, with a smile. "To write to one's friends in absence is like having a talk with them ; and that is pleasant to you without thinking of how the letter is to be forwarded."

But Mrs. Warrener was wrong in her conjecture as to the person with whom Violet wished to converse in this silent and mystic fashion. She had no intention of writing a long love-letter, full of contrition for past cruelty, and promises of kindness in the future. She took advantage of the dead calm to write the following few lines to her father :

"Yacht *Sea-Pyot*, off the Coast of Skye, Sept. —, 187–.

"My dear Papa,—I suppose by this time Mr. Miller has told you that he has asked me definitely to marry him, and that I refused. I could not marry him. I waited a long time to see, because he was so anxious about it, but it was no use ;

and I am sorry if I have caused him pain or annoyance. And so you see, dear papa, as I am not engaged, and have no prospect of getting married to any body, I am thrown on your hands again, like a bad six pence. I had some notion that you had got rid of me at last; but I really could not bring myself to marry Mr. Miller. Now what I want you to do, dear papa, is this. I do not think I can stay longer with Mrs. Warrener when they return to town. They have been more kind to me than I can tell you—all of them; I have never seen any body in my life treated with such constant kindness; I can never be sufficiently grateful to them. But I don't think I can always stay with them; and do you think, dear papa, you could board me out somewhere when I get back to London? I should be sorry to trouble Lady North; if we did agree for a time, my temper would soon break the whole thing up again. And if you could think of some way, dear papa, in which I could be useful—I should not like to be living like a genteel pauper, doing nothing, caring for nothing. I should like to earn my own living, if you would allow me; and I have been thinking of two or three ways. They say my figure is passable; I might become one of those living models that the big milliners have for showing ladies' dresses—walking up and down, you know, before the purchaser. Or I might get a place in one of those large restaurants, to serve behind the bar; but I fear that would tend to give me a low opinion of my fellow-beings. I could not be a governess; I should box the dear creatures' ears when they were impertinent: besides, that trip to Canada pretty nearly put an end to my music. I could not take to dress-making; because I make nearly all my own dresses, and I would not make another woman's for her, to encourage her in her idleness. So what is there left? I am glad that I am not a father, with a bad sixpence always turning up; but I am your affectionate daughter,

"VIOLET NORTH."

She went on deck.

"Violet," said Mr. Drummond to her, speaking in a very kindly way, and noticing that her eyes were cast down, "if you want your letter posted soon, we will go in to Broadford instead of going on—that is, if we are ever to see Broadford again."

"Oh no, thank you," she said, with much distinctness. "The letter is in no hurry. It is quite a question, indeed, whether it catches papa in town."

"Have you written only to your papa?" said Mrs. Warrener, concealing a smile.

"I have written only to papa," the girl said, turning round with some surprise.

They did get down to Broadford, however, creeping along before the occasional puffs of wind, which were becoming more frequent. When they drew near the opening of the bay, they had then to decide whether they would go in and anchor for the night, or go on; the skipper being altogether in favor of going on, partly because he always expressed a certain doubt about the safety of Broadford Bay, and partly because there were indications that this too fine weather would not last. So on they went, in the wonderful roseate evening, watching the colors die out on the hills, and the first yellow glimmer of the Loch Alsh light-house appear in the gathering gray. What wind there was began to shift about somewhat; they had the topsail taken down as they got into the narrower waters between Balmacarra and Kyle-Akin. When, after dinner that night, the voyagers came on deck, as was their wont, they saw that the moon behind the black hills of Skye had an ominous ring round it. They were clearly approaching the end of that long spell of fine weather.

But the wind did not rise till next morning about seven or eight o'clock. All through the night they had been creeping along through the dangerous Narrows of Skye and into the opener waters of Glenelg Bay; and it was well that they had fair sea-room when this squally south-eastern gale began to blow. In a very short space of time the aspect of things was considerably changed. When Mr. Drummond put his head up the companion, he got some intimation of what was going on by finding his cap caught by the wind and whirled out to sea. He returned with the report that it was raining hard; a good stiff breeze blowing; the sea rising.

Smothered in water-proofs, they made their morning appearance on deck. What a change! Watery mists half hiding the gloomy mountains of the main-land; the sun only a confused glow of light behind the whirling masses of vapor; the sea a stormy and desolate waste of gray-green, with the long, rushing, roaring lines of the sea-horses coming sweeping along to break on the plunging bows of the vessel. Violet was glad of all this—of the new, keen life and motion that had burst upon them; she would go into no shelter; she stood with her face glowing red with the beating rain, with her teeth set against the wind, with her eyes proud and glad for the first time since she had been at this place before. No longer did she look at the rain-desolated Isle Ornsay, or the gloomy mountains of Loch Hourn, with any thing of sentimental regret. This wild day seemed better fitted to her now. In her reckless feeling of the moment, she hoped the gale would increase a hundred-fold; had she been alone on board, she would have been glad, perhaps, had the vessel gone foundering down to the bottom. The past was gone—with its fair summer skies, its blue seas, its thousand secret and tender hopes; now let the wild winds blow as they pleased!

And they did blow, though not at the bidding of an unhappy girl. Captain Jimmy had very speedily to reef his mainsail; and the hatches were closed, for there was a good deal of water coming leaping over the *Sea-Pyot's* bows.

"We shall have a heavy sea on before we get down to Ardnamurchan," said—or rather shouted—Mr. Drummond to his skipper.

"Na," said Jimmy, with the rain running down his nose, "na, na, it will be no a ferry bad sea; but," he added, cautiously, "it will be better if the leddies will put the things in the cabin safe—that will be better whatever."

Indeed, long before they got to Ardnamurchan they had need to make things secure, for the gale had raised a heavy sea, which tossed about the small *Sea-Pyot* like a cork, and rattled the glasses and candlesticks below in an alarming manner. Yet there was much delight in this day's voyage—through the plunging seas and whirling rains, and past the bleak and desolate islands lying in the waste of waters. There was little opportunity for speaking; there were many things to claim attention; Violet, for one, was glad of the excitement and distraction afforded by the storm. As the day wore on, the violence of the wind increased; and when at length they got down to Ardnamurchan and faced the mouth of the Sound of Mull, the sea was running high enough to cause the yacht to groan and creak in all her timbers as she rose and plunged with the waves. The skipper did not at all like the look of the sky. There were intervals of a strange darkness, followed by periods of a no less strange light, when the sun seemed to be shining through a mass of vapor quite close at hand. Along the western horizon there was a curious copper color. No one was particularly sorry when the *Sea-Pyot* succeeded in running into Tobermory Bay.

But even here, in this small harbor, the gale pursued them; and in the dusk they could hear the heavy waves dashing against the sea-wall and the quay. Before turning in for the night, the skipper threw out his second anchor, and an anchor-watch was ordered. During that wild night, some of those in the small cabins lay awake and listened to the creaking of the timbers as the yacht plunged and rolled at her anchorage, and to the long swish of the waves along her sides; and even these sounds were scarcely so ominous as the tramp of men overhead and the calling of the skipper—he having got his mates up at two in the morning to lower the topmast and take the gig in from her davits on deck, so that the wind should have less pressure on the yacht. Had she dragged her anchors that night, there would have been no need to tell this story.

In the morning the state of affairs was even worse. The gale had increased in fury. Here, in this small harbor, huge green waves went rolling by—their summits caught and whirled away in foam by the wind, to dash on the sea-wall of the little town and send volumes of spray on to the houses and shops. All the doors were shut against the storm. The blue smoke from one or two chimneys was blown this way and that by squalls of wind; and now and again the woods on the hill beside the town were swept by flying rain-clouds. Out at sea nothing was visible but the white crests of the breakers; but here in the bay the crews of the coasters—black and bulky craft that rolled heavily in the waves—were busy making themselves as secure as they could with extra cables. It was a sufficiently perilous business for two men who were in a small boat; and who, every minute or so, were completely lost to sight in the trough of a great wave, while at other times the water could be seen breaking over them in drenching showers.

Of course there was no chance of getting out that day; it was for a long time doubtful whether they dared venture ashore, short as the distance was. At length Mr. Drummond volunteered to go ashore in the gig with a couple of men to post Violet's letter. But she would not give the letter up.

"I am going, in any case," said he. "You may as well allow me to post your letter for you."

She stood irresolute, impatient, embarrassed: she had a great wish to implore him, for her sake, not to venture; but how could she do so *now?* The men were lowering the gig. Drummond was buttoning on a big sou'-wester.

"Now, Violet: the letter, if you please."

She suddenly pulled it from her pocket, tore it in a dozen pieces, and flung it overboard—the wind whirling the pieces away like feathers.

"Why did you do that?" said he. "I must go ashore—there is no risk."

He jumped into the boat and took the tiller-ropes; the men pushed off from the yacht and struck their oars into the water; the next moment the gig was borne away on the crest of a mighty wave, only to dip the next minute, and half disappear in a cloud of windy spray. They nearly fouled the chain-cable of one of the colliers—which probably would have ended their voyage for them; but having missed that danger, they encountered no other; and soon those on board the yacht saw through the sea-spray the tall figure of Mr. Drummond walking solitarily along the the high quay.

"Don't you know why he has gone ashore?" Mrs. Warrener said to Violet, with an amused look.

"No—not at all," the girl said. "I can imagine no reason at all for running into such danger."

"There is not any danger, Captain Jimmy says, only they will be drenched through in coming back."

"And why did he go ashore?"

"To get some new bread for you. He was vexed that you had to eat biscuit at breakfast this morning."

"I would rather eat tarred rope," she said, vehemently; and then she stopped and turned away: she was schooling herself to silence.

In due time Mr. Drummond returned on board, drenched, but successful. He had got new bread, fresh butter, a newspaper not more than two days old, some fresh milk and eggs, and a cap to replace the one of which the sea had robbed him the day before. Likewise there were two or three little trinkets for the women: he said the impulse to buy every thing he saw was almost irresistible—he had grown so tired of always finding the same amount of money in his pockets.

The wild weather continued all day. Occasionally a brief break appeared in the flying clouds; and a watery sunshine streamed down on the white house of Tobermory, and on the green trees over them and around them; this flash of brightness being all the more brilliant on account of the black masses of rain-cloud forming the background to the green and white little town. But presently this frail vision of sunshine would disappear; and the old picture would be presented of the huge green waves, of the black hulls of the coasters rolling heavily, of white foam and wind-swept clouds.

Then rain set in steadily in the afternoon, and they were forced to go below, to seek refuge in books and cards. Occasionally, there was a little conversation—not much; and Violet was glad when it ceased; for she was beginning to see that Mr. Drummond wished very much to be considered gay and cheerful, whereas the quick eyes of the girl perceived that he was so only by fits and starts, and obviously with some effort. He had been rummaging among the books left by his friend in the yatch; and had lighted upon an old copy of Herodotus, which he professed to treat as a description of Europe at the present day written in a form or a parable. What was this about a marriage-market, and the prettiest girls fetching the highest prices? And how could Cyrus have known any thing about the Stock Exchange when he said: "I was never yet afraid of those who in the midst of their city have a place set apart, in which they collect and cheat one another by false oaths?" He was much interested in learning that the vessels which sailed down the river to Babylon were circular; and also that "every vessel has a live ass on board, and the larger ones more;" but he considered that the writer had made a slip here, as we have not yet adopted the circular form iron-clad. And so forth. Sometimes they understood these occult references; sometimes they did not. Had Mr. Miller been present, he would have turned away disgusted, for he never saw the fun of any one trying to puzzle you by obscure jokes. A joke was a joke—something to laugh at—not a conundrum. What, for example, could Mr. Drummond mean by saying to him one night at the Judæum that he supposed the favorite wine at the Club was old Clo' de Vougeot?

They were more interested, however, in the next book he proceeded to skim; which was a statistical description of the Hebrides, accompanying the sailing directions issued by the Admiralty. For suddenly he said,

"Sarah, do you think you could leave London?"

"For good?"

"Yes."

"To live where?"

"Somewhere about this coast."

"Oh," she cried, "think of the winter—the bleakness, the bitter cold—"

"It is exactly the absence of cold that is the attraction—that made me think of living here in reading this book. The temperature of Lewis is the most mild and equable of any part of the British Isles—as I read. Snow seldom lies in these western regions. Look at the various shrubs and plants that grow out-of-doors here that are only to be found in hot-houses elsewhere. They have camellias in their gardens in Cantyre."

"What should we do all the winter?" said his sister.

"That is the point," said he, rather wistfully. "Would you care to make the experiment? We might get tired of it—but not more tired than I am now in London."

"I will go with you wherever you please," she said.

"How about Amy?"

"She can finish her schooling now at home," her mother answered.

Some silence ensued. It was with a strange sinking of the heart that Violet had heard this conversation. They had never mentioned her; they seemed to take it for granted that she would leave them when they returned to London; and yet, she asked herself, why? They could not have known what she wrote to her father; and she had given them no hint of her intentions. Up till now they had invariably consulted her about their joint plans, and were almost too anxious to accommodate their arrangements to her wishes. Now she was left out altogether; and she knew them too well to suspect them of any thing but an innocent assumption that it was unnecessary to ask her.

Amy, who had been absent, came into the saloon at this moment.

"Come here, child, and tell us—would you like to come and live always in the Highlands?"

The girl, in the most natural manner in the world, turned to Violet.

"What do *you* say, Violet?"

Happily, in the dusk the extreme embarrassment of the girl was not visible.

"Oh, I?" she said hurriedly. "Your mamma understands, Amy, that—that you must leave me out—"

"You are not going away from us?" cried her old school-companion, in dismay.

"Not if we can prevent you," Mrs. Warrener said, in her kindly way; and as she was passing she laid her hand on the shoulder of the girl—"not if we can prevent you, Violet. But there comes a time when the young birds will insist on flying away from the nest; and though we elder folk can't be expected to like it, still it is the old story. Come, who will adventure for a blow on deck? We must give the saloon up to Duncan now."

The force of the gale still prevented their leaving Tobermory that day; it was not until the following afternoon that they were allowed to start. By that time a vague impression had been formed in Violet's mind that she had made her last trip in the *Sea-Pyot.*

CHAPTER XXX.

CHALLENGED.

OTHER impressions, too, she was rapidly forming, of a much graver character, and likely to lead to a decisive action. The quick eyes of the girl saw through this affectation of cheerfulness which James Drummond sought to preserve in her presence. She came to know, in a vague way, and yet with absolute certainty, that he was beset by an anxious care. She had expected that the breaking asunder of those tender ties which had been too hastily formed would have released him, at least, from all anxiety and embarrassment, and she was glad to think that that would be the result, whatever the cost might be to her; now she knew, with a great sadness, that this her best of friends, carried about with him a heavy heart underneath all that pretense of kindly merriment. She knew it. She could read it in his eyes when she met him unexpectedly. And she could not but imagine that the cause of this secret care was herself.

What could be more simple than her line of reasoning?—if that could be called reasoning which was rather a succession of leaps of fancies and emotions. He was wretched because he could not return the affection she had offered him. To free him from that hasty and mutual pledge was nothing, so long as she remained there to recall it by her presence. To a person of his imaginative, sensitive, and unselfish temperament she would appear as a standing reproach; he would consider himself—however unnecessarily—the cause of her unhappiness; and would be miserable himself in consequence.

"And this," she thought to herself, with some bitterness, "is what I have brought to him; this is how I repay him for all his kindness to me."

And so she became more and more anxious to get back to Castle Bandbox. Perhaps something would occur then to put an end to this unhappy state of affairs; though she knew that her heart-ache over the loss of the one highest dream of her life was not to be cured by any change of circumstance. She breathed more freely, then, when at last they weighed anchor, and stood out into the Sound of Mull.

The wind had fallen rapidly, but there was still a heavy sea on, and the afternoon sunlight sometimes shone stormily through the floating masses of vapor that clung about the Mull mountains. By-and-by the wind had so far abated that it was deemed permissible to hoist the topsail; and so they beat down the Sound at a very fair rate of speed, hoping to get home before midnight.

By-and-by they came in sight of a house, only the tops of the chimneys of which were visible over a line of dark-green trees. It looked a solitary place, on these lonely shores.

"That is Finnorie," said the skipper. "There is no song the people will like so well as the 'Farewell to Finnorie'—not any song they will like so well as that one."

Violet did not know this pathetic little piece; but she knew that she, too, was bidding her farewell to Finnorie, and to more than Finnorie. They were all standing on deck at this time. She said,

"It is a sad thing to bid good-bye to a place you have known."

"It is a sadder thing to bid good-bye to illusions," said Mr. Drummond, somewhat absently; but he had scarcely uttered the words when he seemed to check himself. "Though one ought to be glad about it," he added, quickly; "the sooner we get rid of illusions, the better. The operation is not nice, but the results are wholesome. Finnorie, now. And that is the manse of Finnorie? I suppose the song will last a century yet. Perhaps it was only an accident; or was it composed with a view to posthumous fame? There is no man without that, you may be sure; though the ordinary person's notion of posthumous fame is to live in the kindly recollection of sons and daughters, and grand-children, and friends—a very good thing too, you know—it has a hold on a man's actions; it may make him more generous than he would otherwise be. What, now, is the nearest town or village to this remote little manse? Loch Aline, I suppose."

He stopped there. Loch Aline—that was the place young Miller was supposed to make for when he left them on that memorable Sunday. Some strange things had occurred since then—to strange, perhaps, to be understood just yet.

The dark came on; in the dusk they could see the livid blue waves burst into flowers of white foam as they went rushing past. It was an angry sea, though there was not much wind.

"The sea is very deep here, I suppose," said Violet to the skipper—she happened to be standing alone with him—he at the helm.

"Indeed it iss that," said Jimmy.

"If you went overboard, you would drown soon—perhaps you might drown before coming up at all?"

"It would be a ferry bad thing to try that," said the skipper, with a shrewd smile.

She had not the least intention of trying that. It was a passing fancy—nothing more.

But they ran a greater chance of seeing it tried that night than was at all pleasant. When they were well out of the Sound and crossing to the south of Lismore light-house, they were struck by a sudden squall. In the midst of the darkness—the moon not having risen as yet—there was something startling in this sudden roar of wind that caught the *Sea-Pyot* and threw her over almost on her beam-ends. Instantly the skipper called out to lower the topsail, and there was a confused scuffle forward. The next moment there was a loud shriek from Mrs. Warrener, who had rushed up the companion-way to see what all the noise was about, and who just then caught a glimpse of one of the men being whirled by her in the dusk and carried right up and over the gig, where he remained suspended in mid-air, the flapping and straining topsail tearing this way and that over his head. That was Alec. Somehow the sheet had got twisted round his feet, and the force of the wind on the loose sail had torn him from his hold, though he clung to the rope like a rat. A brief, exciting period of tumult ensued. Mr. Drummond sprung to the man's aid, and caught him by the boots; another of the sailors came running to his assistance; and together they hauled him down on deck. But the question was how to get those great blowing volumes of canvas secured, for the gale was sweeping them this way and that; and again one of the sailors was knocked off his feet, and had to cling to the bulwarks to prevent his being driven into the driving sea. This was becoming too serious. Violet was standing by—frightened, but with all her senses about her.

"Can you hold her for a moment?" the skipper called out.

The girl seized the tiller; and he made a dive at the fluttering canvas, while the sailor got his legs again. But what was she to do? Right ahead of her the great glow of the light-house burned in the night; if she kept the boat away, she would expose her still further to the fury of the gale, and make it more difficult for the men to shorten sail; if she ran her up to the wind, she might get dangerously near the long, black promontory of Lismor. Captain Jimmy, however, had no intention of intrusting the safety of his vessel to alien hands for any thing but a second. In another moment he was back at the tiller; the men had the foresail secured; and all the damage done by the sudden squall was that Alec had lost his cap, and that Amy Warrener, having been thrown down on the floor of the saloon, had been overwhelmed by a shower of candle-snuffers, shilling novels, and biscuits.

By-and-by, an equable breeze having succeeded this fragmentary hurricane, they found themselves lightly and pleasantly running for home, while the moon had come up in the south over the black islands, so that they should easily pick their way along the hilly road to Castle Bandbox. It ought to have been a joyful return after all this beautiful cruise; but there was a great silence on board, the chief talker being more than usually absent and thoughtful.

"We shall soon be ashore now," said Mrs. Warrener to Violet, the two of them being in their little cabin, packing up various things.

"I suppose so," said the girl.

"I hope you have enjoyed the trip?"

"Oh yes, thank you," said she—the thoughtless answer to an ordinary question.

"And you will enjoy a few days on shore before we start again."

"I do not think I shall be with you next time, Mrs. Warrener," said Violet.

"What do you mean, Violet?" said her friend, ceasing her work and standing up.

Perhaps she would rather not have answered. Every thing around her seemed so wrong and miserable that talking about it promised little. But, after all, there was something of the wildness of despair in the way in which the girl threw out her hands and began to speak hurriedly and excitedly.

"How can you ask that? Do you not see what is going on? Do you not see that you brother is miserable; though, with his constant kindness, he tries to conceal it? And I know I am the cause of it; and when I know I am the cause of wretchedness to my friends—I—I think it is time I was out of the way."

"Violet," said Mrs. Warrener, taking the girl's hand, "you are too impulsive—you will do something wild some day. Now will you listen to reason? A great part of what you say is true. James has not been quite himself for a few days back; and there is no doubt he is a little anxious about you, That is natural. He has had the greatest interest in you ever since he knew you, and he has had a great affection for you; and he is not a man to throw those things aside lightly. He is not at all a man like that. When he has got to like any one, there is no use arguing with him; he is very steadfast.

Now, can you wonder at his being rather troubled about you? You yourself have not been overhappy, Violet, of late."

"I do not think I have been—I have been—overhappy," said the girl, with a strong effort to restrain her tears.

"And can you wonder that he has been perhaps rather too anxious about you, considering how easily you will get out of all this unfortunate trouble!"

"Well," said the girl, vehemently, "he shall not be vexed and troubled about me. I am not going to requite all his great kindness to me that way."

"You would best remove his trouble by becoming happy yourself, Violet," her friend said, with a smile, "and you will soon be able to do that."

"Soon?" said the girl thoughtfully. "Shall I soon be able to remove this trouble from him?"

"Oh yes."

"I suppose now," said Violet, speaking in a strangely slow and measured way, "I suppose now, you would say that there is nothing—nothing in all the world he would not do to make me happy?"

"Nothing!" said James Drummond's sister, honestly, and with decision. "I believe there is nothing in all the world he would not do to make you happy."

The girl thought for a moment; and her face was rather pale.

"And I, who am only—" she managed to say that, and no more: she drew a long breath, and fell back, her hand unconsciously catching at the edge of the berth. Mrs. Warrener, with a short, quick cry of terror, caught hold of her before she fell, and managed to get her on to a chair. After all it was only a faint—what more common than that? When she came to herself, she was very much ashamed, and she wondered how she could have been so stupid; but there was an unusual look about the eyes which Mrs. Warrener could not understand.

She professed to treat the whole matter very lightly, however.

"You are such a wild and headstrong girl, Violet, in those fancies of yours, that I don't know what is to become of you. I wish you were safely married, and had some one to look after you."

"I think I will go up on deck now," she said—her face still somewhat pale—"it is cooler there."

Her friend accompanied her. They found the *Sea-Pyot* now drawing near to her moorings, and they recognized in the moonlight the familiar outlines of the dark hills behind

Castle Bandbox. There, too, was the little bay, the yellow sand showing a pale semicircle of light in the shadow, where the two girls used to bathe.

"Wouldn't you like to go down there now, Violet," said Amy, "and have a bathe in the moonlight?"

"I should like to catch you at it, either of you!" said her mother. "And yet I know you are both bound to be drowned there, sooner or later."

Out went the rattling anchor-cable with a roar, in the silence of the night; there was some busy work with the sails; then the gig took the voyagers into the small landing place. In the moonlight they walked away up through the quiet meadows to the cottage on the hill. There was little said.

Years upon years it seemed to Violet North since she had left that small home up there; for indeed the very moments seemed years now, as she felt her life pushing forward to some tragic climax with swift, inexorable, irrevocable steps. The gathering volume of her emotions—love, and pride, and gratitude all commingled—was carrying her onward, whither she as yet dared not look.

But she wished to look and to know, whatever it might be; and when the others had gone into the house, and were busy in unpacking and so forth, she slipped round by the back, and got into the road that led away up among the hills. The cool mountain-air was grateful to her hot forehead; in the silence she could think of all this that had happened to her, and was going to happen; she was glad to be alone. She wandered on, not paying much heed to the rocks, and heather, and young plantations, all faintly visible in the moonlight, but vaguely conscious of the murmur of a stream in the valley below her, that seemed to make the silence of the night more intense.

She was in no blind and passionate bewilderment of grief; she was too proudly self-possessed for that; and yet it seemed to her that a great sadness dwelt over this beautiful night; and perhaps, once or twice, she remembered that she had no mother to whom she could go at this terrible crisis of her life. She reasoned with herself very calmly. It was her great misfortune to love this man with her whole heart; he knew it, and his life was made miserable by the knowledge: how was all this unhappiness to be cured? Her going away would do no good; she would leave with him that anxious care about herself, that dumb, unspeakable regret that haunted him and clouded over the ordinary bright and joyous spirit. And what was she, that she should cause this wretchedness to the one among all human beings whom she most loved and honored? Her sore heart-ache, incurable as it was, she could have borne; but not the thought of the pain she was inflicting on this dearest of all her friends, who sought so anxiously and yet so vainly to conceal the wound. She reasoned calmly enough, perhaps; but her heart was beginning to beat fast; and all the high, impulsive, proud spirit of the girl was rising to the firm lips and the pale face. She stood still now and listened; there was no one to interrupt her self-communings. And this was the question she asked herself—not audibly, but so that her beating heart could hear:

"In the old time, when you were careless and happy, you asked yourself whether you could die for the man that you loved; and you were very proud to answer Yes. You were very sure then you could do it. And now, if the same question is asked, what will you say? Will you meanly retreat from it? If nothing will do but getting out of the world altogether—so that the old glad light will come back to his eyes in time, after he has forgotten all about you—can you show to yourself what your love is worth by doing that?"

She was not so calm now. The beautiful dark eyes were full of a strange agony; she was breathing quickly; her face was paler than the moonlight itself.

That was the question she asked herself; what was the answer? No man, woman, or set of circumstances ever confronted this girl with a challenge, and found her turn aside from it: that was not possible to her. The answer to the question was written in the firm lips and the wild, white face.

After all, what was this sacrifice that was demanded of her? The book of life, so far as she could read it in her bewilderment and despair, was to her only a record of disappointment on disappointment, of regret, and lamentation, and grief. She had had no kindly-cared-for youth; and now her womanhood, as she was about to enter upon it, and as the fascination of it glimmered before her like a beautiful vision, had been suddenly shut off in darkness, and she was left with only the bitter memory of what might have been.

She heard steps behind her, and turned quickly. She found Mrs. Warrener, with some light shawl thrown round her head, coming toward her.

"Violet, what do you mean by runing away like this? I felt sure you had gone up among the hills by yourself."

The reply was a strange one. The girl took her friend's head between her hands and kissed her gently, and looked wistfully and earnestly into her eyes.

"If I have annoyed you at any time," she said, "and if you think of it afterward, you will believe that I never did mean it, and that I was very sorry. You will promise me that; and if I have done harm to any one in your house, you will ask them to forgive me, and forget it when they can."

The gentle little woman burst into tears.

"O, Violet, what do you mean?" she cried, with a strange apprehension in her breast. "Why are you crying? what is the matter with you, that you are so pale?"

"It is nothing," said the girl. "We will go back to the house."

They walked down the road in the moonlight, both silent; for Mrs. Warrener was beset by vague fears, and she was afraid to question the girl too closely just then. When they had entered the house, Violet escaped to her own room, for it was now late. She stood for a moment at the window—looking out on the black hills, and on the trees, and on the small patches of oats, that the moonlight made of a silvery gray—and she was holding her hand tightly over her heart.

"Don't break yet"—this is what she would have said, had her wild, despairing fancies been translated into words—"don't break just yet, until I have made my friends happy. Then you can do with me—what you like!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"FAREWELL! FAREWELL!"

PERHAPS she did not quite know how it had all come about; how, in the midst of the trivialities of ordinary life and the distractions of a holiday trip, this tragic doom had overtaken her with swift, inevitable strides; but, captive as she was, and not a little bewildered by the sore aching of the heart, she nerved herself at this moment to act and think with promptitude and decision. And, indeed, although there was much of impulsive romanticism in the girl, there was a good deal of plain common sense too; and she had a keen sense of honor. When, in that breathless, wild way, she determined to free those who were dearest to her—and especially him whom she regarded with all the generous, self-sacrificing ardor of a girl's first love—from the pain and unrest of which she knew she was the cause, the idea of suicide did not even occur to her. Her quick pride would have instantly rejected what she held to be mean and cowardly. But how otherwise was she to accomplish that which she had now set her heart upon?

One evening, in former and happier days, James Drummond had amused his small domestic circle with a description of a strange land. It was a land distant and unnamed, far across the seas, to which had fled all those people who have mysteriously disappeared from among us—absconding merchants who have left their coats and hats on the bank of a river; young men entangled in a love-affair who have gone up a Welsh mountain and apparently never come down again; people supposed to have perished by shipwreck; married soldiers who have taken the opportunity of a great battle to escape from conjugal squabbles; and so forth, and so forth. In his idle, fanciful, desultory way, Mr. Drummond went on to describe this mysterious land, this earthly paradise, where the debtor walked about free from his debts; where the young man no longer feared an action for breach of promise; where the "missing" soldier found peace at last. It was but a passing plaything; probably next day he could not have told that he had ever mentioned such a subject. But there was one present on that evening who put a higher value on Mr. Drummond's fancies and speculations than he did himself. Idle words sunk deep into her heart: for they were the utterance of the man she loved.

And now it occurred to Violet North that she could do no better than go away to this unknown land across the seas; and when her friends had got over the temporary pain of believing her to have been drowned, they would soon forget; and he whom she most considered would regain that old bright cheerfulness of disposition that she remembered in the bygone time. What could be more simple? And yet she did not sleep much that night.

Early in the morning she arose, and dressed herself noiselessly. For a brief instant she had gone to the window, and she shuddered as she looked out on the gloom of the sleeping world. For the sea lay like a lake of ink all around the dark-green shores; and the mountains of Mull were of a sombre purple akin to a black; and the distant sky was dark with low and threatening swathes of cloud. Overhead, it is true, the heavy grays of the dawn were mottled here and there with tinges of crimson; but it was an angry and ominous conjunction, and she shivered as she turned away.

She stole quietly into the small chamber where Amy Warrener lay asleep, and she but half awoke her girl-companion and friend.

"Are you going for a bath, Violet?" said she, noticing the bag that the other had in her hand.

"I came to say you had better not come with me this morning, Amy," said she, in a calm voice. "It is gloomy and cold; and I think it will rain."

"Then why do you go?"

"I must go," was the answer. "I have been out of sorts lately; I want something to waken me up. Now go to sleep, Amy."

For a second time she stood irresolute. She would have given worlds to have touched her friend's hand, to have kissed her, and said good-bye, as a token of her farewell to all the household; but she did not dare to do that. She closed the door gently behind her and went down-stairs. In another minute she was outside.

And now, far more awful than the gloom that lay over land and sea—over the dark mountains, and the woods, and the sullen waters that lapped along the desolate shore—was the silence of this dead world. Not a bird seemed to be stirring yet. The silence was absolute but for the whispering of the cold gray leaves of some willow-bushes that the wind of the morning stirred.

With her heart beating quick, she walked down the slope and along the valley toward the sea. She had no sense of injury to sustain her in what she was doing. If she had suffered any wrong at the hands of those whom she was leaving forever, her pride would have come to the rescue. Wrong? She turned at the foot of the valley, and looked back to the small white cottage on the hill that held all that she cared for upon earth; but her eyes could not see much, for she was crying bitterly. And all that was in her heart then was a prayer that the light of Heaven might descend and rest upon that household; and that her well-beloved might never know with what an agony of grief she was now bidding him and his a last good-bye.

Then she turned again, and made her way toward the sea. And, as she was but dimly aware—for her mind was full of desolation—across the gloomy picture of the dawn the stealthy fingers of the rain began to creep, coldly and silently removing mountain after mountain, and leaving in their place a cloud of dismal grey. A chilling wind came blowing in from the sea; a cold, stinging drop or two of rain touched her face; the islands out there began to grow misty and remote; and then a slow fine drizzle began to make the ferns by the roadside droop, and the grass and weeds wetter than ever. She walked on blindly; perhaps it was the cold that made her seem to shiver from time to time.

At length she got down to a part of the coast where a bold and rocky promontory, partly covered by trees, went out into the sea, sheltering from the violence of the waves a small bay of fine sand. At the corner, where the sand met the black rocks, stood a small bathing-machine. There was not a human being to be descried anywhere at this early hour in the morning.

She went along the seaward edge of the rocks, and sat down, completely hidden from view by the trees. She took off her hat, and put on instead a bonnet to which was attached a thick veil. Then she sat motionless, thinking.

Of what did she think then—if that could be called thinking that was but a wild, bewildered groping in the blackness of despair? Of the days long ago, when the wild school-girl was full of an audacious life and gayety? or of the quiet and pleasant evenings that she used to spend in that simple, beautiful, unworldly household, where all good and noble things were reverenced, and the mean and base had no existence? or of the dawning of that wonderful hope that for a brief time had added a strange glow and color to her life? If she saw these beautiful pictures, it was as through a darkened glass. Her mind was overshadowed. She was almost as one that was dead.

Some mechanical instinct made her think of the time. She looked at her watch. The great steamer, coming down from the Hebrides, and bound for Glasgow by way of the Mull, was due in an hour; and she had nearly three miles to walk to the pier. She rose.

Her funeral service was simple. She merely placed the small bag she carried on the rocks, close to the edge, so that they might imagine she dropped it when she slipped and fell over, and then she threw her hat into the sea. She watched it float; the dark current was running strong; would they seek her body far over there by the gloomy shores of Linsmore and Morven?

She pulled the thick veil down over her face; and then she set out to walk to the quay—in the slow drizzle of the rain. She had now assumed a more courageous gait; she was resolved to bear herself bravely, now that she had to face the world for herself; in a pathetic, bewildered way, she even tried to look at the merry side of the whole business, and wondered what the people in the steamer would say if they knew they had a dead woman on board. To aid this enforcement of courage, she tried to hum a cheerful air; but she quite broke down in that; for right in the middle of it she happened to catch a glimpse of that white cottage, far up the valley, in the midst of the grays and greens of the hills, and the merry song ended in a choking sensation of the throat. She turned away her head, and would look no more in that direction.

There was a great deal of bustle about the pier, for the big steamer from the North was just coming in, and there were cattle and goods to be landed. In the general confusion she would easily have escaped recognition, even if any of the people about had happened to know her; but in any case she only remained a minute or two on the quay, for as soon as the *Clansman* came in she went on board and got below, where she remained during the whole time the steamer was unloading and loading again. She was quite alone in the large cabin; few people coming from the North care to go round the Mull of Cantyre when they have the option of cutting through the Crinan Canal. She sat in a corner of the cabin, in the twilight, closely veiled; and it was not until she felt the vessel begin to throb with the action of the screw that she ventured up on deck. The *Clansman* was just putting off from the pier.

Was there not time to undo what she had done? As the steamer backed, she saw that she could easily spring on to the edge of the quay; and for a second she found herself almost driven to this leap, the despair of her isolation getting the mastery over her. But she held on firmly to an iron railing beside her. In another second the *Clansman* had got clear away from the pier, and was churning her way out to sea.

That dreadful morning seemed to consist of years. Was it not years since—in the half-forgotten long-ago—that she had looked up with a vague terror to the mottled gray and crimson of the sky, and shuddered at the awful silence of the world? How long ago was it she had sat on the rocks, and pictured to herself her friends coming down to seek for her, and finding her bag close to the edge of the precipice, where, as they would imagine, she had dropped it as she stumbled and fell into the depths below? Then the sad, despairing walk along the wet ways, in the silence of the morning. Now she was surrounded by the noise of many people talking in a strange tongue; and it all seemed a wild dream to her. She was not crying now. She was thinking, in a dull and confused way, of all manner of ordinary things—of the indifference of these poor Highland people to the rain; of the cattle on board; of the discomfort of traveling at night by rail from Greenock to London; of the two five-pound notes and the two sovereigns she had in her purse. The people about her were very busy with their own affairs, or they might have wondered why this tall girl, wrapped up in her water-proof and veil, stood there as motionless as a statue, gazing blankly at the coast they were leaving behind.

But by-and-by she became strangely agitated; for as the steamer got farther away from the land, she came in view of the valley at the head of which stood Castle Bandbox; and she ought to have been able to get a glimpse of the white cottage on the hill, but she could not, for it was hidden behind the gray mists of the rain. And then it seemed to her that now at last her only friends were lost to her for ever and ever; and still her heart strings clung to that wild shore and the misty valley until she thought they would break. The bitter agony of parting from all that she cared to know and see seemed worse to her than death itself; she would have welcomed with a glad joy a real death rather than the living death which now lay before her in her way through the world.

" Far away—in the beautiful meadows—is the house of my home. Many a time I went out from it into the valley—O you beautiful valley! I greet you a thousands times. Farewell, farewell!"

The echoes came to her from out of the half-forgotten past; they spoke of a time when such temporary partings were the sweetest pleasure compared to the bitterness she was now enduring. How yearningly the girl's heart clung to that fast-receding land! The world around her seemed to know she was leaving home, friends, and the one beautiful, glad hope that for a time had brightened her life; and that she was leaving them forever. Far over there, the long lines of hills seemed themselves clouded over with the darkness of grief; and the gray mists were weeping, remote and in silence; and the very winds of heaven, blowing coldly about her, had but that one sad refrain—"Farewell, Farewell!" Then the coast disappeared altogether behind the mists of the rain; and she turned to the restless gray-green sea that was rushing by—the sea that in a short while her friends would be regarding as her nameless grave; and in her heart she prayed to God that as soon as may be the burden of life might be taken from her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN LONDON.

Damp and windy as was Euston Station on this wet and mild September morning, it was nevertheless a welcome relief from the close carriage in which she had slept but little during the night. She was glad to breathe the fresher air. She looked around with some surprise—for town sights were as yet unfamiliar to her—as she walked along toward the gate.

"Cab, miss?"

She wondered what a dead woman could want with a cab, and passed on.

But she was not blindly and heedlessly walking alone in the world of London. All the long night she had pondered over what she should do, and her high courage stood her in good stead. So far as might be, she had laid down shrewd, practical plans. She knew very well, for example, that with £9 10*s.* in her pocket it was impossible for her to set out for that distant trans-atlantic region, where the mysteriously dead come to life again: she would have to remain in London, and support herself, and save money for the long voyage. Before getting a situation, she would have to get lodgings; before looking about for proper lodgings, she would have to go to a hotel; before going to a hotel, she would have to provide herself with some luggage, for the sake of appearances. It was well that she had all these things to think about just at this time.

A curious fancy took possession of her that she would like to have a look at her former home; and there was little risk in doing so, for she was deeply veiled; and besides, it was the family breakfast hour.

"They don't know yet I am dead," she said to herself, "or I might appear at the window and give Anatolia a fright."

She was turning the corner of the railings, when she was nearly knocked down by a tall, white-bearded man who was pushing by in a great hurry. He just avoided a collision; muttered, "I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon," and hastened on without noticing her.

But she had caught one swift glimpse of this man's face, and that was full of anxious pain.

She looked after him with a secret fear. Had he just got a telegram, then? Was he about to start for Scotland by the day mail? Or had he just got a letter describing the unavailing search along the shore for the body of his daughter, and was he about to telegraph a reply? The bewilderment of trouble in her father's face touched her deeply, and she would fain have rushed after him, and confessed; but she hardened herself and remained firm.

"I am sorry for you, poor papa," she was thinking to herself, as she stood and looked after the retreating figure, "and for them, too; for you will all be pained for a little while. But in the end it will be better. In a year or two you will all be happier, and by that time you will have forgotten all that was bad about me; and if you think of me at all, it will be a kindly sort of thinking."

So she walked on, assuring herself she had done right; though her mind was still filled by the picture of that man hurrying by with a wild grief in his face.

In Tottenham Court Road she purchased a large and heavy portmanteau, which further crippled her finances, but she reasoned with herself that a light portmanteau would provoke suspicion at the hotel; while, when she set sail for the mysterious region, a formidable portmanteau such as she had bought would come in handy. Having thus equipped herself with luggage, she got a four-wheeled cab, and bid the driver drive to a certain small and semi-private hotel in Great Portland Street. She had been there once with her father to visit some Canadian friends, and had been struck by the smiling and roseate face of the landlady.

The buxom dame, with her ruddy cheeks and her black curls, was standing in the hall when she entered. There was no great embarrassment about the tall and shapely young lady, who explained that she wanted a room for two or three days, until she could provide herself with lodgings; but for a moment she quailed, for the landlady regarded her with a puzzled expression, as if she half remembered the face. However, as Violet instantaneously recollected, she could not possibly know her name; and indeed the landlady dismissed the effort at recognition, and bid the hall-porter carry the young lady's luggage up to a particular room. The young lady asked if she might have some tea and dry toast sent up to her; experiences in Canada perhaps accounting for the business-like air which she wore.

When she was quite alone she sat down and began to think. It was very terrible, this sensation of being in a strange house, among strange people, all by herself. If she felt like this already, how would she be able to reach that distant country in which she was to remain hidden for the rest of her life? Or was this only the first plunge that affected her so?

A tap at the door made her heart jump; it was only a maid-servant with a small tray. Before she went again, the girl said, with a sudden impulse,

"Would you ask the landlady if she would kindly step up for a moment?"

The roseate face was a kindly face; the fat woman had regarded this girl with a friendly look of interest. And now—with a womanly seeking for sympathy—she would tell all of her story that needed to be told; and she would ask for advice, which she knew that comfortable-looking dame would not refuse.

Mrs. Roberts came up-stairs, a little out of breath. She begged to be excused for taking a chair when she entered the room; Violet besought her to remain seated, as she wished to say something to her. Mrs. Roberts's round black eyes seemed to grow bigger and blacker with surprise when she heard how this beautiful young lady, with her refined ways, and her distinguished carriage, and fashionable traveling-dress, was suddenly compelled to earn her own living, and was anxious to obtain any employment by which she could fairly support herself. Mrs. Roberts, indeed, was a little puzzled. She could not get over the impression that this young lady was a very superior person: and that to talk of her becoming a governess, or a lady's maid, or any thing of that sort, was, on the face of it, ludicrous. But when Miss Violet, presuming on the evident interest which the good woman showed, asked her if she had any notion what wages girls in the telegraph-office got, then Mrs. Roberts began to believe that she was in earnest, and that one of those catastrophes which too frequently bring down superior persons to the most absolute poverty had thrown this distinguished-looking young lady in a measure under her protection. The curious thing was that she, as a land-lady, and having the instincts and experiences of a land-lady, never suspected Miss Violet North of being a professional swindler. All the outward circumstances of the case suggested that conclusion, and it may be said that of the various employments mentioned by Miss North there was none for which nature had so thoroughly fitted her as that of professional swindling; for she had a face and manner that instantly inspired confidence. This Mrs. Roberts, for example, looked at the girl's eyes, and heard her voice; and she was satisfied. She would have left her in charge of all the silver in the house.

Perhaps it may be said that if she had possessed the internal nature of a professional swindler, she would have lost this candor, and sweetness, and innocence which externally inspired confidence. But this is a dangerous theory. I remember Mr. Drummond giving us a long lecture, one evening after dinner, when the ladies had left, about a photograph some one showed him of a notorious woman who was then being talked of all over England. The puzzle was how this woman had the simple innocence and sweetness of a girl of sixteen written in every lineament of her face, and shining in the amiability of her eyes. He declared it was no puzzle at all. He insisted that there were human beings so utterly lacking the moral sense that in the worst deeps of wickedness they preserved the innocence of ignorance. They were not depraved; they never had any thing to deprave. This girl, he declared, as she sat down before the photographer, knowing that her portrait would be exhibited in every stationer's window, had no more sense of shame than a beast of the field. Look at the sparrow, said he, that does not think it mean or contemptible to filch from another sparrow a piece of bread lawfully the property of the latter; are there not women who have as simple a disregard for the other commandments as the sparrow has for the eighth? But this is getting too far afield; and we must return to the buxom landlady and her new *protegee.*

"Well, Miss ——"

"Main," said Violet, at a venture.

"Miss Main, if you really do want some employment of that kind, I shall be glad to do what I can to help you; though it is not easy nowadays, for all the young girls are too proud to become housemaids; they must educate themselves, and give themselves airs, and assistants, and clerks, and show-women in shops. My brother-in-law advertised not long ago for a young lady— By-the-way, I should not wonder if he knew of some thing that would suit you. He is a photographer in Regent Street. If you like, I will walk down with you to his place by-and-by, when I have got affairs in order."

"I am sure it is very kind of you," said the girl; and, indeed, this sudden stumbling on a good-natured woman made the world seem better and brighter. "Whenever you have a few minutes to spare, I shall be ready. In the mean time I think I will lie down, for I am rather tired: I have been travelling all night."

Mrs. Roberts left with a certain pleased sense of dignity and consequence. She was aiding, counseling, patronizing one who was distinctly a superior person; for if this girl had been of any common kind, would she not have eagerly refused to cause so much trouble? Whereas, the young lady accepted her good offices, with evident gratitude, it is true, but still with a measure of calmness which showed she had been in habit of receiving attention. What a fine thing it is to have dark and tender eyes, a proud, sweet mouth, and the ingenuous blush and smile of twenty! If Violet North had been less bountifully gifted by nature, she might have found it less easy to interest people in her favor on the very first pay of her entrance into London.

It was nearly one o'clock before these two left the hotel, and by this time the streets had been completely dried up by the bright September sunshine. After the wet morning, crowds of mothers and daughters had come out to do their shopping; Oxford Street and Regent Street were full of animation. And Mrs Roberts had attired herself somewhat splendidly; and was pleased to walk with this distinguished-looking young lady; and said to her, with a smile.

"Do you know, Miss Main, people would not imagine from your dress that you were inquiring for a situation where you will probably not get more than fourteen shillings a week?"

"As soon as I get work, I will get a dress to suit it," said the girl, meekly.

She was glad to get out of the glare of Regent Street: there was a terrible risk of her running against some of her father's friends. She followed the stout landlady up the gloomy little staircase. Presently they stood in a spacious chamber filled with colored portraits of all sizes; and here they found one or two people meekly awaiting their fate, while some one was being operated on in the surgery above.

They had to wait a considerable time, for Mr. Roberts was a busy man. When at last he did appear—a tall, grave person, with an untidy dress aud unkempt hair, his hands black with nitrate of silver—he seemed rather to resent the intrusion of his roseate sister-in-law. But he glanced at Violet.

"I have no vacancy," said he, in a quick, raucous voice. "I fancy Dowse has—my next-door neighbor—the furniture people. I think he wants a young woman—a young lady—to keep the books: you can write a clear hand, of course? Write me a few lines at this table."

Violet was rather flurried by his quick, harsh way of speaking.

"I think I can write very well," said she; "but—but my hand trembles just now—"

"Oh," said he, as the next victim was asked to walk up-stairs, "you had better go and call on Mr. Dowse yourself. Excuse me; this is my busiest time in the day. Good-morning: Sally, good-morning."

The blithe landlady was not discomfited.

"We will go in at once and see Mr. Dowse," she said, with decision.

"I am putting you to a great deal of trouble," said Violet.

"We will talk about that afterward," she replied.

Everybody has heard of—and a good many husbands know to their cost—the firm of Dowse & Son, the great artists in wall-papering, makers of Gothic furniture, carvers in wood and stone, and workers in metal. They are the high-priests of mediæval forms and colors. They have established a *cultus* in South Kensington; all about Campden Hill their disciples cry aloud against the gilded fripperies of these modern days. Even as you go past the gaudy windows in Regent Street there is one that attracts you by its mysterious severity; the eye is arrested. For the regenerators of taste have not scrupled to employ the extreme methods of their art even in decorating their own business premises; you must lay aside recollections of worldly vanity and vulgar comfort even as you enter that narrow and gloomy corridor which is painted a livid Egyptian red. You come to a narrow door; the under part is of wood, painted a dead sea-green—the upper part apparently consists of the ends of glass bottles, bars of brass crossing the semi-transparent panes. You enter, and are overawed. There is no trifling, no flippancy, in the stern, unyielding lines, in the massive forms, in the gloomy colors. The oak dado is studded with hand-painted tiles; there is an unpiting stare in the eyes of the falcon, and the leaves of that bit of apple-blossom will last for ever and ever. There is something severer than sadness in the cold gray-green of the wall. Then the broad frieze with its melancholy procession of figures, and its legend in stiff gold letters below: how can those men and women look happy when the firmament above them—that is to say, the roof—is of solid black and green, with splashes of orange-leaves instead of stars?

Well, one must be fair to Messrs. Dowse & Son, and their fellow-workers. They have abolished floral carpets; they have banished gilded plaster; they have inspired a love of sound workmanship and honest materials. It is true that their theory of utility being the proper basis of all ornament is not always carried out; for they give us windows that are every thing that is beautiful, only they don't let in light; and they give us dining-room sideboards that would shudder if cold meat were put on them instead of blue china; they give us mirrors that only reflect distortions, and place them so that even these can scarcely be seen; they give us quite lovely and remarkable fire-places, the most insignificant feature of which is the fire; and, indeed, when you have your dining-room finally finished, and you ask some people to dine with you, you find, in looking round the room, that the furniture is every thing, and the people nothing at all. But high art is as Schopenhauer in its contempt for the worthless race of man.

Now, this Mr. Dowse was a stout, middle-sized, pink-faced, and white-haired man, who had eyes at once shrewd and genial. In business he was both keen and generous; his money came to him easily, and he spent it lightly; he had already made a large fortune for himself, and he was not at all slow to let the artists and artificers whom he employed share in his prosperity. He was an excellent master; he knew good work, and would pay well for it; he took good care to be paid very well for it in turn. When, having had some conversation with this tall young lady (and being quick to see the artistic value of her graceful figure and dark hair in these premises, which he tried to make as like a private house as possible), and when, through some passing shyness, he turned from her to Mrs. Roberts and quietly asked what salary the young lady required, and when Mrs. Roberts, boldly seizing the occasion, said a guinea a week, he assented at once. If she had said two guineas, he would have assented at once. He was almost carelessly liberal in such matters; partly because he made other people pay for his extravagance. So it was understood that Violet North was to have a week's trial in this Gothic furniture place; and she was given an elaborate illustrated catalogue that she might take home with her and become acquainted with its technical terms.

Then as to lodgings, Mrs. Roberts was good enough to provide her with these also. Miss North, or rather Miss Main, explained that it was necessary for her to save as much as ever she could out of that guinea a week, and that a single small room would be quite enough for her: she would be at work all day, and could dispense with a sitting-room at night.

"I wonder when they shut up that place in the evening?" she said.

Mrs. Roberts did not know; but pointed out that that was not the sort of a place to expect late customers.

"Oh, but I hope they will keep open very late," said Miss Main.

"Why?"

"Because I shall have less time to sit by myself after getting home."

"But," said the landlady, with some surprise, "have you no friends or acquaintances at all? Not a single person to go to see of an evening?"

"Yes," said Miss Main, with a smile, "I will come and see you sometimes, if you will let me."

"There is no one else?"

"Not any one. My friends are in Scotland. I suppose there is some stationer's shop about here where they lend you books?"

The room that the girl eventually rented was in a house in Great Titchfield Street: she said it was absolutely necessary for her to live near Regent Street. And if Mrs. Roberts had happened to follow her *protegee* any morning as she went down to Mr. Dowse's warehouse, she would have observed that Miss Main, always deeply veiled, never walked along Oxford Street and down Regent Street, but invariably went down through the narrow little streets lying behind Regent Street, and then got into that thoroughfare close by Mr. Dowse's place.

The week passed, and Mr. Dowse expressed himself quite satisfied. He even hoped that Miss Main found her situation comfortable; and hinted that if there was any alteration in hours, or anything of that sort, which she might prefer, she would have every consideration shown her. Indeed, her duties were not very severe; for every article was numbered and figured and priced in the catalogue, so that she had an unfailing book of reference. She had a pretty little desk all to herself, considerably back in the premises; and she could see the ladies and gentlemen who came in to consult Mr. Dowse or his son, and she could hear them talk, herself being unnoticed in the half twilight. On the other hand, Mr. Dowse was glad to get an assistant, who, besides being able to write write clearly and well, never made any mistakes in the spelling of Italian words, and put the proper accents over her French. Both father and son became very friendly with the young lady, and insensibly began to draw her into consultations about the colors of the hangings, and so forth, until on some points her opinion was invariably asked. Once, indeed, Mr. Dowse, senior, was fairly surprised by some remark she made, and he said to her, "I must say, Miss Main, that you seem to know a good deal about a great many things."

The girl cast her eyes down.

"I—I once lived with some friends," she said, timidly, "who knew every thing, I think; and I used to hear them talk."

"You must have listened to good purpose," said he, in a kindly way.

Well, it was a sufficiently monotonous life that the girl led; but she reflected, with great gratitude, that it might have been much harder to bear. When she grew tired of reading at night in that solitary little room, she used to turn out the gas, and go and sit at the window. She stared out at the pavements, and the few passers-by, and the gas-lamps, and the blazing windows of a distant public-house; but she did not see much of these things. A dream used to come before her eyes; and in place of the gaunt buildings opposite, she saw a wonderful and beautiful picture stretching out before her. It was twilight in the magical Northern land; a faint glow of saffron and red dying out over the mountains of Mull; a clearer metallic, greenish yellow light all over the north; and the sea around the islands shining in silvery-gray. And away down there in the south, over the black island of Kerrara, the new moon hung in the violet-hued heavens, its silver crescent cut in twain by a flake of purple cloud. She could hear the wash of the waves around the shores.

Then she thought of her friends there, especially of him who had been more than any friend to her. It might have been expected that, now she had cut herself off forever from those old friends and old associations, and become surrounded by new persons and new circumstances, the latter would dull the influence of the former over her. No such thing was possible. That unseen influence governed her; it interpenetrated her very nature. Her love for this man took the form of an idolatrous reverence for all that he had taught her, for all that she had heard him say. More than ever would she have had to confess to herself, as she had confessed in former days, "Thou art my life, my love, my heart; the very eyes of me." It was through his eyes that she still saw the world around her, however indifferent it had become to her. It used to move her admiration to see how that tall student of men and manners seemed to be interested in every thing, and how he was content to go anywhere, certain to be amused, if not instructed. She could not pretend to this keen, restless curiosity, for the world had grown very tame to her; but her impressions of things were as certainly molded by his influence oves her as if he had been there to speak to her. One night she got tired of sitting and staring out at the empty streets. She relighted the gas, and took out a small note-book from her pocket. She would try to recollect all the things that he had said to her—those chance reflections which he dropped from time to time in the careless flow of his talk—and this would be the only memento of him she would be able to take with her when she left England forever. And so the meek Boswell began to put down these lines:

"Did you ever try to extinguish a piece of wood at night, and find at the end but one red spark, a beautiful red eye that came again and again through the black as you struck at it with the poker, without feeling that you were a murderer, and the destroyer of a beautiful secret life?

"The only hope of posthumous fame that an ordinary Englishman has, is to live in the memory of his children and other relations. This is a great moral safeguard; it has the most beneficial influence during life.

"Every body is vain, but some people have the faculty of concealing their vanity. On the other hand, ought that to be considered a vice which is a universal, ingrained, inevitable constituent of human nature? What is the good of protesting that the sky ought to be pink?

"The man who considers himself wholly independent of other people—as owing nothing to them that he can not pay—is a dastardly repudiator of millions of debts of obligation, not one of which has been paid, or could be paid, to the real creditor. All his life-long, he has been saying to person after person, 'I am much obliged to you;' and if he were any thing else than a miserable sneak he would make of these perpetual small obligations a general fund to be drawn upon when occasion offers. The other day a wonan said she would be much obliged to me if I bought a box of matches of her. I bought the box of matches. But what is the use of her being obliged to me when I shall never see her again? She ought to pay off the obligation to her husband or to her children."

And so she wrote on; but how cold and formal these things looked, wanting the quick variation of tone and the look of the bright, observant eyes! They were but as dead leaves shaken off from the living tree; one could scarcely believe that these poor withered things had ever shone green in the sunlight.

As she turned over page after page, she came to a scrap of printed matter, apparently cut out of a newspaper. It was a paragraph describing a "Sad Occurrence in the Highlands;" and it told how a young lady, daughter of Sir Acton North, the well-known engineer, had been on a visit to some friends in the Highlands, and how, going on a certain morning for her accustomed bathe in the sea, she must have stumbled, fallen down the rocks, and been drowned, her hand-bag having been found at the edge of the rocks, and her hat having been picked up by some fishermen a mile or two farther along the coast.

"And not a word in praise of me," she was thinking to herself, as she looked at the well-worn bit of paper. "Just when you are recently dead, they generally say nice things about you. Here they don't even mention the sweetness of my temper, which even my friends—particularly Lady North—universally acknowledged while I was alive. But perhaps they will publish a memoir of me some day, under the title of 'The Meek School-girl; an Example for all Good Young Children.'"

She pushed the book and the bit of paper away: her eyes were tired, and perhaps a trifle sad, in spite of all her joking. She leaned her arms on the table, and put down her head on them, and looked as if she slept: that was how she let the spirit escape from its prison-house. London no longer held her at this moment; for she was up at Isle Ornsay, in the clear light of the summer days, and the blue waters around her, and sweet airs blowing over from the hills. That was the beautiful, shining land where life had seemed fair and lovely to her for a brief while; and in this solitude of London, with its hopeless days and lonely evenings, her sick heart yearned back toward that never-to-be-forgotten time, and she saw it again before her as a dream. Was not this the *Sea-Pyot*, with her white sails shining in the sun? Over there, at the point of the land, was the light-house; presently they would go scudding by, to raise flocks of screaming sea-birds off the rocks. Are the guns on deck?—there may be curlew in the bay beyond. And see how the green waves rush by, breaking in masses of foam; and how the great sails strain with the wind; and how the prow of the shapely little vessel rises and breasts the swell of the waters. Whither away now?—still farther into the far Northern solitudes, full of mystery and tenderness, where the air is sweet, and God himself seems near in the awful silence of the mountains and the majesty of the rolling seas. Enough. She rises, here in this poor lodging-house in London, and her eyes are so blinded by her tears that as she looks around her she scarce can tell whether the beautiful, pathetic dream has wholly gone.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LAURELS AT WOMBLEY FLAT.

THE Dowse family—father, mother, and son—lived near Eton, the members of the firm getting down each evening in time for dinner. If nothing but high art was known in their place in Regent Street, nothing but middle-class comfort, of a somewhat profuse order, reigned throughout The Laurels, at Wombley Flat. It was a large, irregular, whitewashed house, with verandas, plenty of conservatories, French windows throwing in floods of light into the rooms, lounging easy-chairs of all sorts of shapes, old-fashioned grates, with hobs to them, and cigar-ash trays on the drawing-room mantle-piece.

On Friday evening the Dowses were, as usual, dining together. Mrs. Dowse had been a slim and spry young burlesque actress when Mr. Dowse married her and carried her off the stage; she was now a portly and elderly person, with a comfortable, complexionless face, and silvery gray hair, who dearly loved her midday lunch and its bottled stout, and who wore a good deal of jewelry in the evening. Her son was also fat and pale of face, parting his auburn hair in the middle, and combing it down on his forehead. He was the member of the firm who lent solemnity and mystery to its transactions. It was he who devised schemes of coloring for the interior of a house; and there was a certain vague earnestness of belief about him which qualified and condoned the shrewd and somtimes jocular look of his father. Dowse *Pere* treated the esoteric talk of Dowse *Fils* with great respect; he saw that other people believed in those subtle laws of tone and harmony; he was content to leave the whole arrangement of a house in the hands of his son, while he undertook the not unprofitable business of furnishing it with high-art furniture.

"Mother," said Mr. Edward Dowse, on this particular evening, "I had a talk with Roberts, the photographer, to-day about that young lady we have had with us now for some time."

"Miss Main?"

"Yes; and she seems to be a greater mystery than ever. His sister-in-law tells him that the girl lives the life of a hermit; goes straight home every evening, and never stirs out; spends her time in reading or writing. On the Sunday forenoon, when every body else is at church, she goes for a walk in Regent's Park; in the afternoon, when every body else is at home or out walking, she goes to church. That is a lively sort of life, isn't it?"

"And what is the mystery, Teddy?" asked Mrs. Dowse, with just a trace of Irish accent.

"Why, it appears Mrs. Roberts knew nothing at all about her before she brought her into our place. Did you know that, father?"

Mr. Dowse was at all times disposed to take an easy, after-dinner view of things; and more particularly at the present moment was he unlikely to bother his head about the missing portions in the history of Miss Main.

"Well, I didn't," said he. "I imagined she was some sort of acquaintance. But what does it matter? The proof of a puddin', you know. Miss Main answers our purpose admirably."

"I did not mean that at all," said Dowse junior, with a flush coming into his pale face; for did it not appear that he had been suggesting suspicions? "I was thinking of something quite different. Now just look at the life that girl is leading. It isn't fit for a human creature. And I don't believe she has a friend in London—"

"Well, well!" said Mr. Dowse, dreamily; he was thinking of having his cigar in the drawing-room, with Mrs. Dowse singing her favorite old Irish songs to him.

"Well, mother, what do you say to running up to town to-morrow, and persuading the girl to come down here with you till the Monday? It would be an act of common Christian charity; and I can assure you she is a most lady-like girl—"

"I'll do it, I will, Teddy, if ye like," said she, readily, and she looked at her husband.

Mr. Dowse had frequently a quiet laugh to himself at his wife and son, who were really simple, good-natured people, with not much sense of humor in their composition; but on this occasion he could not altogether keep silent, even in yielding to them.

"Let us have a clear understanding about it, Teddy," said he. "I don't mind her coming here—indeed, she deserves a holiday, for she is the most tremendously conscientious girl about her work I ever saw. That's all very fine, you know; but is that the whole of it? I hope you don't mean to introduce her into the firm—Dowse, Son, and Daughter-in-law?"

"And what's the use of your putting such nonsense into the boy's head?" cried Mrs. Dowse; but she laughed all the time, for she had seen the handsome young lady many a time, and if the boy would like to have a pretty wife, why shouldn't he?

The young man, though he blushed worse than ever, affected to treat this suggestion as too ridiculous.

"Why, I know," said he, "that she is engaged to some Scotchman or other."

"And how did you find that out, Teddy?" asked his mother.

"The simplest thing in the world," said he, though he was not a little proud of his astuteness. "She is always quoting the sayings and opinions of some friends of hers in Scotland; and you can easily see they are the opinions of a man—a woman wouldn't believe so much in another woman. She has no friends in London—he must be a Scotchman—"

"But how do you know she is engaged to him?"

"Well, can you imagine a beautiful girl like that without a sweetheart? Impossible!"

The object of Dowse junior in asking this favor—which was immediately granted by his indulgent parents—was a mixed one. Doubtless he did feel some pity for the girl, and knew that he was doing a friendly action in breaking in on the monotony of her life. But Edward Dowse had a number of nebulous ambitions floating about in his mind; the study of the mysterious harmonies of colors was only his outward and visible calling. Sometimes he dreamed he would be a great painter; at other times a certain vein of poetical sentiment, which he undoubtedly possessed, enabled him to compose a sonnet or a lyric of some mild merit. These aspirations never amounted to a passion; he was haunted by self-criticism: probably he had too wide and intelligent a knowledge of the methods of other people ever to attack any definite, original work boldly, and without thought of any thing but his own purpose. However, the aspirations remained floating about in a mind that had too many half-formed sympathies. The more he looked at this girl, the more he was fascinated by the possibility that she might become the shock that would suddenly precipitate the floating crystals of his fancy. He seemed to gather strength as he regarded her; there was something dauntless and high-spirited in her bearing, which might inspire a man to write a fiery poem of patriotism and war. There was a mystery, too, about her; she might reveal to him some tragedy—some glimpse of the pain, and suffering, and fortitude, to be met with among the commonplaceness of life. He did not wish to fall in love with her, but he was fascinated by her; and he wondered whether he might not learn something of the story that was hidden behind that proud reserve of hers.

Mrs. Dowse had a hard fight of it with Violet, who, with great gratitude, but also with much firmness, declined to go down to Berkshire. But Mrs. Dowse had not come up to London for nothing. Pressed into a corner, the girl weakly based her defense on the fact that she had no traveling-bag; whereupon a traveling-bag was instantly produced by Mr. Dowse himself, who forthwith sent off his wife and Miss Violet in a cab to the lodgings of the latter, where she made a few necessary preparations for her brief journey. Mrs. Dowse was very kind to her.

Now, if these friendly people had any notion before that there was some mystery about the girl, they were not likely to have the impression removed by a closer acquaintance. She seemed strangely familiar with modes of life not likely to come within the ken of a shop-assistant. Yet she talked very little during the railway journey: they could not understand why she should be so sad and silent, when they were taking her off for a holiday.

It was her first glimpse of the country since she had been up among the Highland hills and seas; the first time she had escaped from the prison of the city. And yet these out-of-door sights seemed somehow strange and unnatural; the outer world had changed since last she saw blue skies and green fields. True, this midday sky was blue enough when they got well outside London; and the sun was shining down on green meadows; but the green was raw, wet, and wintry. Out by Ealing and Hanwell they came into the region of orchards; the leafless branches of the short and stumpy trees were black. But still farther out the trees were not wholly leafles ; the oaks were still of a russet-brown, the elms of a golden yellow, the pines dark-green; and then they got into the country proper, where there were long stretches of plowed land, and here and there a field green with spring wheat just coming up; and dank meadows, with sheep in them that would have been badly off without turnips. Moreover, though it was November, there was a spring-like mildness in the air;

and the skies were blue enough. Was it only fancy that convinced her the world had changed so much within a couple of months or so?

A wagonette and pair of handsome grays met them at Windsor Station; Mrs. Dowse got up on the box-seat and took the reins, Violet sitting next her, the others getting in behind. Away they drove down the town, and over the bridge, and out through the old-fashioned streets of Eton. Violet's spirits rose. Here the air smelled sweet; and she was fond of driving.

"I see you don't use bearing-reins," said she, lightly, to her companion. "I remember one of my father's horses that never would go with the bearing-rein. It was no use. There was merely a jibbing-match when they tried to fasten up his head; and yet you never saw an animal that held his head better—without any bearing-rein at all. It used to look odd, though, to have a bearing-rein on one horse, and not on the other."

She had no thought of what she was saying; but Mrs. Dowse had. So this young lady's father had his carriage and pair of horses!

When they had reached The Laurels, and when Violet had been shown up-stairs to her room, Mrs. Dowse did not fail to repeat to her husband and son that bit of conversation. But Dowse senior repudiated his wife's inference.

"Nonsense, Florry! Her father may be a coachman, who has given his daughter a good education. The poorer classes in Scotland are very well educated."

"But she is not Scotch."

"No; no more she is. Oh, well, if her father was a duke, it doesn't matter. Suppose we call her Lady Violet?"

"I should not be surprised," said Dowse junior, with a mysterious air, "to learn that her name was not Main at all."

"What's that?" said his father, sharply. "Do you mean to say we have got one of the swell mob into the house—who is to open the doors to her confederates in the middle of the night—that we may be all murdered and robbed? This is a pretty pass you have brought us to by your benevolent pity."

Mr. Edward Dowse did not like being made fun of: he opened one of the French windows, and went out on the lawn.

Now, when Violet came down, Mrs. Dowse proposed that they should go round the garden and have a look at the place generally; and here, also, their guest betrayed an amount of knowledge which was scarcely to be expected. She knew all the finest flowers in the conservatories; she knew how these ought to be kept when cut; had they heard of the new Java plant that a particular florist was selling at twenty pounds a piece? They discovered, however, that she was clearly not a country-bred girl. She knew nothing about pigeons, or about the various breeds of fowls, or even about vineries; and she was quite helpless in the kitchen garden. Nevertheless, she was very much interested; and they spent the afternoon right pleasantly, until the gathering twilight and the chilly air bid them go in and dress for dinner.

The more that Edward Dowse saw of this girl, the more was his curiosity stimulated. He sat opposite her at dinner, and could see the effect of every thing that was said on the expression of her face. She had been a trifle embarrassed at first: that had worn off; now she was talking quite brightly and cheerfully—it was some time since she had been roused into vivacity by social intercourse. And all these speeches of hers were, in a measure, a revelation of herself; he began to fashion imaginary histories of her.

His fanciful study of her, however, was interrupted by a singular little incident. He was talking of certain artists whom he knew; and happened to mention, quite accidentally, the Judæum Club. She instantly looked up, and said, quickly,

"Do you—know that club?"

"I am a member of it," he answered.

The girl was silent for some time after that; but he never forgot the quick look of anxiety—almost of fright—that passed over her face as she asked the question. That she knew some one in that club he considered obvious; and also that that some one had had something to do with her previous history. Here, indeed, was something for him to think about.

If Violet had been seized with a sudden fear on learning that this young man belonged to the club of which George Miller was a member, she did not let the knowledge disturb her enjoyment of that evening. They had really a very pleasant evening; though it sometimes recalled other evenings that were now best hidden away in the past. There was a blazing fire in the white-and-gold drawing-room; and a good deal of cigar-smoke too. Mrs. Dowse, in a worn and feeble voice, the defects of which were almost condoned by her cleverness of expression, sung all sorts of old and familiar Irish songs, and sung them very nicely indeed. Then she would have her son sing also; and Violet had a suspicion that these pretty little chansonnettes that he sung, with their tears, and roses, and nights profound, were of his own composition. She did no care much for that kind of thing; she had been educated in a robuster air. When Mr. Dowse hinted that perhaps Miss Violet also sung, she went to the piano at once, and there was mischief in her face.

Now, the young lady had the poorest opinion of her own singing, and in ordinary circumstances would have flatly declined to make what she considered an exhibition of herself; but a certain rebellious feeling had got the better of her, and she was determined to give a counterblast to all those melancholy utterances of an affected French sentiment. She was fresh from the North; hothouse airs sickened her. There was a malicious humor in her face as she sung, at random, and with some briskness, the good, old, wholesome ballad of Willie's visit to Melville Castle, which, as it may not be known much in the South, one may be pardoned for quoting here:

"O Willie's gane to Melville Castle,
Boots and spurs and a',"

—it begins; and there was a sort of gallant and martial air about the singer that convinced one of the listeners that if she had been born a man she would most assuredly have become a soldier—

"To bid the leddies a' farewell,
Before he gaed awa'.

"The first he met was Lady Bet,
Who led him through the ha',
And with a sad and sorry heart
She let the tears doon fa'.

"Near the fire stood Lady Grace,
Said ne'er a word ava;
She thought that she was sure o' him
Before he gaed awa'.

"The next he saw was Lady Kate:
Guid troth, he needna craw,
Maybe the lad will fancy me,
And disappoint ye a'."

By this time Violet could scarcely sing for laughing; and Mr. Edward Dowse had a sore suspicion that she was making fun of those transcendental longings of his, in rose-gardens, with bruised hearts, and the ashes of dead love gray in the moonlight. Mr. Dowse, too, woke up: he was not at home in French metrical composition; but here was something distinctly intelligible. She continued:

"Then down the stair skipt Lady Jean,
The flower among them a';
Oh, lasses, trust in Providence,
And ye'll get husbands a'.

"As on his steed he gallop'd off,
They a' came to the door;
He gayly raised his feather'd plume;
They set up sic a roar!

"Their sighs, their cries, brought Willie back,
He kissed them ane and a',
Oh, lassies, bide till I come hame,
And then I'll wed ye a'!"

She was not ashamed of the graceless song, as she rose from the piano with a malicious look still in her eyes; and Mrs. Dowse was vastly delighted with it. But as for the person whom it was meant to convert to the notion that, after all, there was a little humor in human nature, and that a man could not spend his life in beating his forehead in the dust before a mysterious, scornful, and probably rather foolish woman, he was just a trifle offended at first, and would even have ventured on some disparagement of Scotland and Scotch literature generally, had he not been promptly warned off that dangerous ground. These dissensions were brought to an end by a servant bringing in the candles and putting them conspicuously in the middle of the table. That was a custom against which Mr. Dowse protested in vain: his wife would have it that it was better to light your candle in the drawing-room than in the cold hall.

Mr. Edward Dowse went up to his own room, which seemed to be partially fitted up as a study. There was a big fire burning in the grate; a comfortable easy-chair before it; a table, with a box of cigars, a bottle of claret, and writing materials on it. He lighted a cigar, and sat down before the fire.

He was a much more impressionable and imaginative young man than Mr. George Miller; and there was something in the nature of this girl—even in her courageous manner—that affected him keenly, because he was so absolutely destitute of the same qualities himself. She had put some fire and nerve into his somewhat nebulous brain: at this moment, as he poured out a glass of claret, he wished the glass could have been a bowl—a beaker he could have quaffed to Lady Jean as she came down the stair. Soldiers' songs began to stir in his memory; he drank a glass or two of claret; some ringing phrase caught his fancy—surely he, too, could write something that would rouse the heart like the call of a trumpet. He began to pace up and down the room nervously—coining phrases, rhymes, and so forth; and then he hurriedly sat down to the big white sheet of paper. What would she say to this?

"Stand up, my lads!—I give to-day,
The heroes bold of Tanqueray!
Be they in heaven, or down in hell,
Or living still, I can not tell:
What matters it? Up, and give a drain
To heroes living and heroes slain!
And deepest of all to those, I say,
Who fought like fiends at Tanqueray!"

He was positively trembling with nervous excitement: he threw his cigar into the fire, drank some more claret, and continued the rapid, scrawling, nervous handwriting;

"God's truth, it was the dead o' night
We stole like wild cats up the height;
And Highland Billy he cursed and swore
He never had seen such rocks before.
'Kee Vee?' says a fellow. I dealt him a blow
That sent his soul to the devil below;
And then, with a yell, and a laugh, and a cheer,
Made the wakening Frenchies shiver with fear,
We sprung at the guns!—Boys, that was the way
We began the divarsion at Tanqueray!"

This, now, was the sort of ballad to put before the girl, whom he likened to Brunhilde, the warrior-queen—the fierce maiden repellent of love—unapproachable, unconquerable!

"Asleep? Not they! All the black of the night
Began to sputter with jets of light—
And higher and higher—
And nigher and nigher
Came the crackle and roar of the musketry fire!
'Curse them, I'm done!'—I heard him fall—
That was the last of poor Pat from Youghal."

And that was the last, too, of the glorious legend of Tanqueray, wherever Tanqueray may be! There was no staying power in the young man. He had got so far, when he began to fear he had heard something like it before; and this uneasy consciousness caused him to throw down the pen and take up the paper. He would look it over; and so he lighted another cigar.

It did not read so well now. It was shockingly out of keeping with those mystic sonnets of passion which he hoped to publish some day; and what would ladies say to so much bad language? What would Brunhilde herself say?

Brunhilde would have said nothing at all; but it is probable she would have, as usual, fallen back, in her thoughts, on a remark of her master's: "Force of phrase is only the bit of clay that a butcher's boy flings at a brick wall in passing; force of feeling is the strong, inevitable, gentle wind that carries a ship across the sea." It was not her judgment, but the judgment of James Drummond, that would have spoken. He was still—she knew he would be to the end—the "very eyes" of her.

As for this hysteric effort of a weak man to assume the language of a coarse and strong man, it became more and more distasteful to the author of it, who tore up the paper, threw his second cigar into the fire, and got to bed; so that the world was deprived forever of the ballad of the fierce fight at Tanqueray.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN ENCOUNTER.

Violet came down next morning to the clean, bright breakfast-room. The French windows showed her the sunlight shining on the green lawn outside and on the yellow leaves left on the chestnuts. There was a brisk fire burning in the grate. All this bright, warm comfort, and the strange quiet of the Sunday morning, even the spotless purity of the table-linen, seemed so different from London.

She feared all this. She wished she had not made the acquaintance of these friendly people. She would rather have been without this glimpse of kindly home-life before she left England forever. The world had grown very dark for her; and as her chief wish now was to be out of it, she did not care to make new friends or cultivate new associations she might have to leave with some regret. That lonely room in London was more to her liking.

Mrs. Dowse came bustling into the breakfast-room, smiling, radiant, apologizing to Violet for being late, and almost apologizing for having dressed herself somewhat smartly. She said she had given up the notion of surviving her husband and marrying again; so that she could not afford to forfeit Richard's affections by sinking into slatternly habits. Richard liked to see her smartly dressed in the morning; and there was nobody else to dress for. If she were lost, Richard would advertise that she was not of the slightest use to any one but the owner. And so the good-natured woman chattered on in a friendly way; and Violet really began to like her, despite her somewhat heavy golden chains and brooches.

At breakfast, Violet seemed rather disinclined to go to church; but when Edward Dowse—who looked rather pale and unhealthy in the morning—suggested that they should have the wagonette and drive away to a certain remote and picturesque little parish church which he named, she eagerly assented to that. In due time they started.

"Why do you wear a veil in the country, Miss Main?" said Mrs. Dowse, with a smile.

"I suppose it is habit," the girl said.

It was indeed an ancient and picturesque little church they reached at length; the outside largely overgrown with ivy, the inside quaint, dusky, and smelling of damp. They were country people who sat in the benches—mostly old, wrinkled, and bowed. The parson was a rubicund, benevolent-looking man; presently his voice sounded in a monotonous and melancholy manner through the hushed little building.

She heard little of the service; her heart was sore. It seemed to her that this small out-of-the-way church was a bit of that "old" England that was very dear to her, and that she was about to leave forever. Leaving London was nothing. But where in that far land to which she was going would she find the old-fashioned parish church, and the simple peasants, and the easy-going paternal pastor? It was all part of a picture that had been familiar to her from her childhood—the ivy on the walls, the dull, diamonded panes inside, the marble tablets, the oaken pews, and the fresh-washed faces of the girls who stood up in the choir to sing. Sometimes, in London, she went to a very grand church, which had fine architecture without and elaborate decorations within; and she was much impressed by the music, and she listened attentively to the sermon. She had never thought twice about leaving that. Here, in this Berkshire church, she paid but little notice to the different parts of the service, and the monotonous voice of the parson rambled on through his discourse unheeded; but she knew that she would remember this little building and its people and services when she was far away, and would know that she had left behind her a part of herself that no other country in the world could give her.

More and more she began to regret that she had ever been tempted away, even for a day, from the lifeless life she was leading in London.

There was another reason, too, why she wished to be safely back in her hiding-place. She could never say that by accident she might not stumble on some one who knew herself or her father, so long as she was moving about among strangers and strange places. In London she was secure. She had even a sense of freedom there. She had got accustomed to that plan of life which she had devised as best likely to prevent detection; and it was no longer an embarrassment. In the twilight that prevailed over her desk she was safe. In the back streets leading up to Oxford Street she was safe. Once the plunge across that thoroughfare taken—and she had a thick veil to conceal her face—she was close to her lodgings, and she was again safe.

But here, driving about, traveling by rail, and so on, who could tell? Moreover, she had been greatly disturbed on learning that Edward Dowse was a member of the Judæum. She knew that in such an association of perhaps fifteen hundred persons, it did not at all follow that one picked out at random should know a certain other one; but there was the risk; and if Edward Dowse did happen to have the acquaintance of George Miller, all that she had done might suddenly be rendered useless. While she remained in London, her conversation with the Dowses, father and son, had been almost exclusively about business affairs. Edward Dowse would never have thought of telling her that he was a member of the Judæum. On the other hand, he had not even the right to take a friendly interest in her affairs. They were practically strangers, and apart. Now the case was somewhat different; and as the girl knew perfectly well that the Dowses must suspect her of having belonged to a condition in life superior to that which she was now in, she began more and more to dread the consequences of this kindly interference in her welfare.

Then she noticed, with some dismay, that Edward Dowse would persistently talk to her about the Judæum Club. At luncheon, for example, he sat opposite her—she facing the window, he in shadow; and she knew that his eyes were fixed on her as he proceeded to speak of this man and that man, professing to give humorous little sketches of them. They were not as keen, shrewd, and accurate sketches as George Miller could have given of some of his fellows; they were loose, imaginative, and rather weak; but she noticed that he always mentioned each man by name. The fancy leaped into her head that this young man had noticed her embarrassment on the preceding evening, when he announced that he was a member of the Judæum Club; and that now he was trying to find out—by the same key—which of the members she knew. Her supposition was correct.

The mystery about this girl fascinated the young man. Perhaps it was more a literary than a personal interest he had in her—he imagined possibilities of romance in connection with her which might perchance feed his poetic flame; but, at all events, he was determined to find out, if he could, who and what she really was. The method of discovery he employed was not highly ingenious, but he persevered with it; while the mere suspicion on her part that he was talking about clubs for this purpose produced a great embarrassment in the girl's manner, which rendered it certain that if he did mention the right name by accident, she would assuredly betray herself.

"After all," he was saying, "there is a democratic equality and independence about an ordinary big club that you don't get in the smaller clubs that are founded by distinguished people for particular purposes. In these small clubs the big men tyrannize over you; and they do that when they are dead, too. You go into the place as a guest; your friend tells you that the club was founded by So-and-so; you look round the room at the nobodies who are there, and wonder at the cheek of the man who sits in the chair at the head of the table. These ghosts of the big men overshadow the place. But in an ordinary large club, like a hotel, Mr. Ferdinand Stettin, the wool-broker, is quite as good as the Hon. Arthur Hunt, who is Lord Exington's youngest son, and Dalrymple the stock-broker pays for his lives at pool just like Captain Duke, who has got the V.C."

Stettin—Hunt—Dalrymple—Duke: it was rather clever to get four names, apparently at hap-hazard, into one sentence. But they were useless.

"Do you play pool?" said she, making a desperate effort to get him away from talking of his club acquaintances.

"A little—not much," said he, modestly: the fact being that he had played it once, and had lost his three lives in about five minutes.

"A friend of mine," she continued—still hurriedly—to get him away from the club, "used to say that that was the only thing worth saving money for."

"To play pool?"

"Oh no," she said, quickly, for she was a trifle confused. "He used to say that if life were like a game at pool, and you could at the end of it 'star' and come to life again, by paying money, then it would be worth while saving up money. He could not understand any one hoarding money for any other purpose. That is the phrase, is it not, 'to star?'"

"I believe so," said the accomplished pool-player.

He was not thinking of pool at all, but of this unknown and mysterious friend of hers. So he played in the billiard-room at the Judæum. That was a further clue; and here, indeed, young Mr. Dowse was getting "warm," as children say at blind-man's-buff, although, as a matter of fact, she had not been talking of George Miller at all.

In the end he was baffled—at least, so far as that day was concerned. He did know George Miller—as club-men know each other—but by some strange accident he never happened to mention the name. Moreover, he could not go on all day talking about clubs, especially as the girl made valiant efforts to drag the conversation elsewhere. At night, in communion with himself over a cigar, he had to confess that he had failed; and that he knew no more about Miss Main now than when she had started with them the day before, except, perhaps, that it was more manifest than ever that she had not been born and brought up in the condition of life which she now, voluntarily or involuntarily, occupied.

Violet was glad to return to London. Mrs. Dowse had been good enough to say, as the girl left on the Monday morning, that she hoped her next visit would be a longer one; and the young lady had returned her grateful thanks, without making any promise.

She returned to her book-keeping duties, to her veiled and hurried flights across the greater thoroughfares, to the silent and monotonous evenings in that small room, herself alone with her books, and her memoranda, and her dreams. She was growing impatient now; pinch as she might, her savings increased but slowly. Including the money she had at the outset, she was now possessed of something like thirteen pounds; but what was that? She could not set out on her voyage to the land in which the dead come to life again with only thirteen pounds in her pocket; she could not even get to New York, which she had come to consider as the first point to be gained.

One evening Mrs. Roberts called on her: there was a roguish look on the roseate face; the good woman was determined to be facetiously angry.

"Miss Main," said she, "I am come to talk seriously to you. I have been speaking with your landlady; she says you eat nothing."

"I am sure I eat as much as any one: do I look as if I were starving?" said the girl, cheerfully.

"You are not looking well at all. You may not know it, but you are not. Now—you will excuse me—but I said I would look after you, whether you liked it or not; and now if you are trying to save a little money, seeing that you are all alone like, what I say is this: don't save it out of your eating and drinking, but ask Mr. Dowse to raise your salary: that is what I say."

The girl never thought of denying that she was trying hard to save money.

"I could not do that, Mrs. Roberts. I am sure I am very well paid."

"Oh, nonsense! The Dowses are very rich; they ought to give you thirty shillings a week now; and they would do it in a moment, if you asked them."

"I could not ask them."

"Then I will."

Violet was irresolute. On the one hand, she was exceedingly anxious to get away from England; on the other, she had a humiliating consciousness that if the Dowses gave her this increase of salary, it would be out of a friendly compassion.

"Then there is another thing," continued the impulsive Mrs. Roberts, smoothing the black hair over her shining face. "My brother-in-law spoke to me about it yesterday. He wishes to introduce some new process that he has bought from an American, and he wants to get one or two good subjects—to make good pictures, you know. Now—would you mind sitting to him some forenoon—Mr. Dowse could spare you for an hour or two—and—and you might as well have a five-pound note as not, if I may venture to tell you a secret—"

The girl's face flushed, but she was not angry.

"No, thank you, Mrs. Roberts. I could not do that."

"He says you would make a capital subject—perhaps with a bit of fancy costume—"

"I really could not do that," the girl said, quickly. "It is very kind of you, however. Let us talk about something else, Mrs. Roberts. Do you know any body in New York?"

"In New York?" said the landlady, with a sharp glance. "Do you think of going to New York?"

The question was so direct that Violet answered it unawares.

"Yes—by-and-by."

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Roberts, rather anxiously. "And if you will allow me to say so, I think it is rather dangerous for a young lady to be going about like that—quite alone—"

"Yes; but what if there is no one to go with her?" said the girl, without any bitterness at all.

"You know, Miss Main," said the landlady, earnestly, "you would soon make friends enough, if you cared to; but if you go from one town to another, how can you?"

"Does your brother-in-law know any body in New York?"

"I will ask him, if you like; but I hope you won't think of going."

Instead, however, of asking Mr. Roberts about his American friends, she went down to Mr. Dowse and told him that Miss Main had some notion of going to New York; and that if he wished to retain her services he ought at once to raise her salary. Mr. Dowse had not the least objection; although, he said, before Miss Main had formed any such intentions she might have made complaint to himself. Mrs. Roberts replied that Miss Main had made no complaint to any one; and from that moment Miss Main received a very handsome salary, all things considered, for thirty shillings a week.

Now, indeed, her small hoard of savings began to increase more appreciably; and she looked forward with some sad hope to the time when she should be released from the fear which more or less haunted her while she remained in this country. So far, all her plans had been successful.

So far, only. One evening, as she was hurrying home, she found herself stopped by a man who would not get out of her way. With some indignation she looked up; and then she could scarcely repress a cry of alarm. Standing before her —a trifle pale, perhaps, but not much agitated—she found George Miller, who merely said "Violet!" and put out his hand.

CHAPTER XXXV.

TIDINGS.

He did not at all betray the fear that might have been expected in the case of a man who, believing that a certain woman has been dead for some months, suddenly finds her standing before him in the streets. The terror too plainly was all on her side. Even by the light of the gas-lamps, and even through that thick veil, he saw the frightened stare of her eyes; and when she spoke, it was with a hurried and harsh voice not like that of the Violet of old.

"Is this an accident?" she demanded, abruptly.

"N-no," he stammered. "It was an accident, certainly, that I heard from young Dowse about you; that is to say—"

"Does he know who I am?" she again demanded, with the same abruptness. Her hands were clenched, and her face deadly pale.

"No, he does not."

"Nor any one?"

"No one but myself. I waited to make sure. Violet, why have you done all this?"

She paid no heed to him. For a second or two she remained silent; then she said, vehemently,

"No one knows but yourself. You must give me your word of honor—you must swear to me—that not another human being shall ever know!"

He almost retreated a step, bewildered.

"Violet," said he, in a protesting way, "I don't understand you. You—you don't know how sorry we have all been—and —and you expect me not to go with such good news—to your father, and others: it would be madness; you have no right to inflict such pain upon them merely because of a mad freak; I don't understand it—"

"No, and you never would understand it," she said, bitterly, "if I explained it to you a hundred times over. It is a mad freak! You think I was pleasing myself, and grieving others unnecessarily? Well, that is no matter. What any one thinks of me is no matter now."

She uttered these last words in an absent way. Even he was struck by the tone of tragic despair in them; he could not understand this strange thing.

"Come, Violet," said he, "you have made a great mistake; but nobody will think any thing about it—we shall all be so glad to get you back again. You and I were not great friends when we last saw each other; but now—well, you must let me share in the happiness you will cause to every one. No one will ask you any questions you don't wish to answer. You will have every thing your own way. You won't be asked to do any thing you don't like."

He was talking almost at random, for he was very much excited; and behind all this garrulous speech his brain was busy working with all sorts of other speculations. Was it possible she run away because she had found herself miserable up in the North? Was it the prospect of her marriage with James

Drummond that was the cause of her misery? And now—seeing how definitely she had testified to her repugnance—was it not possible that she might be induced to revert to her earlier friend, who now stood beside her, and who had mourned her loss with much sincerity of feeling?

"You don't know—you don't know," she said, sadly, in answer to all these solicitations of his. "You talk to me as if I were a spoiled child, who had run away from home. My own way? Was there any thing in which I did not have my own way while I lived with those good friends? It was not that at all. I was the cause of great unhappiness; and—and I loved them; and—and I knew it was better for them and every one to think that I was dead—"

"I am sure you are mistaken," said he, earnestly, yet he saw how little effect his words had. They seemed to go by the settled sorrow of that pale face. "The greatest unhappiness they could have known was your death."

"That will all pass away," she said. "I considered that. They will be grieved for a time—for I think they liked me, in spite of—in spite of every thing; but afterward it will be all right. Now," she added, with renewed decision, "you must give me that promise."

Bewildered as he was, he had still sufficient strength left him to resist that demand, and he did so boldly. But she was fully as firm. At length he asked to be allowed some time to consider. Would she give him till the following evening, when he could meet her again?

"No," said she, "you must promise now, absolutely. And we must not meet again."

"You have no right to make such a demand," said he, warmly. "Do you mean to say that I ought to let your father remain in ignorance that you are alive?"

"You had no right to discover my secret," she answered.

"Wait a minute—let me think," he said, resolved not to stumble into some irretrievable blunder.

They were now walking up and down Great Marlborough Street—slowly pacing the almost deserted pavement. It was only when they passed a gas-lamp that he could catch a glimpse through the veil of that pale face and the dark eyes he used to know. Well, as they walked so, in silence, Miller struggled hard to keep all his wits about him in this serious crisis. He knew the decision of which this girl was capable; if he did not at least pretend to accede, there was no saying what further rashness on her part might not result. His first point was to gain time. Supposing he did promise, he might talk her over afterward. Moreover, by yielding so far, he might induce her to reconsider that resolve of hers that they should not meet again. He was an acute young man, after all; and he saw what an advantageous position it would be for him to become her only friend. He would make a show of furthering even her wildest projects, for the present.

He had never been madly in love with this girl; but, so far as his nature allowed him, he had cherished a high regard for her; he had warmly admired her good looks and fine figure; he had even been fascinated, in a way, by her high courage and frankness; and his imagination had at one time painted pleasant pictures of her seated at the head of his dinner-table. Now once more that fancy flitted before his mental vision. She was alone; she was friendless; she was living in poor lodgings (he had tracked her home twice, and made all sorts of inquiries about her, before actually confronting her); she was a woman, and surely subject to persuasion.

"Violet," said he, and he stopped for a moment, "I give you my word of honor not to let a human being know—until you give me leave. Will that do?"

She took his hand and pressed it warmly. She was grateful to him.

"And now," she said, somewhat sadly, "before we part—and you must never seek to see me again—will you tell me something about—about my friends? It will be the last that I shall hear of them, I suppose."

"Violet," said he, with more impulse than was common with him, "I can not bear to see you so miserable—you have not deserved it."

"I am not miserable," she said. "I should be more miserable if I were causing pain to those whom I love. And as for what I have deserved—well, who can tell that? I don't see any one who gets just what he deserves. I know those who ought to have every thing in the world, because they lead such noble and beautiful lives—"

He knew well to whom she was referring.

"—and I know others—well, you may call them unlucky, perhaps, but they are not so distressed about their misery as they might be—if only they know—"

A sort of stifled sob arrested his attention. He had not seen that, underneath her veil, tears had been stealthily running down her cheeks.

"Violet," said he, "I am very sorry. And I don't understand why you should be unhappy. Nobody would have thought *you* were born one of the unlucky ones."

"I am not unhappy," she asserted, making an effort to regain her composure. "Tell me how my father is. Is he in London? Have you been to Euston Square lately?"

He told her all he knew of the North family; and, indeed, he was pretty well acquainted with them, for he called upon Lady North and her daughters regularly. Then he paused.

"And Mr. Drummond—how is he?" she asked, calmly, as they walked along.

"He has been very ill."

She stopped suddenly, as if some pain had throbbed through her heart.

"Is he ill now? Is he better?"

"Well," said he, telling an untruth that he had deliberately prepared, "I haven't exactly heard lately. It was rheumatic fever, I believe; he has been walking a great deal at night, and he got wet once or twice—"

"But—but you say he is better?" she said, and there was an urgent entreaty in her voice.

"I can't exactly tell you," he answered. "I have not been over there since they returned from Scotland; I only hear of them through Lady North. But, if you like, I will make inquiries."

"Yes, yes!" she said, eagerly.

"And I can come and tell you."

"When—to-morrow? Can you ask to-morrow?"

He had gained his point. She was to see him again.

"Yes, I can make inquiries to-morrow, and let you know in the evening. Where shall I see you? Can I call at your lodgings—or is there any friend's house—"

"No," she answered, quickly. "We must meet here, I suppose."

"At the same hour?"

"Yes."

"And now shall I walk up with you to Titchfield Street?"

She stared at him.

"How do you know I live there?" she asked, sharply.

"Well," said he, with an air of apology, "I had to make sure before I spoke to you: I was anxious not to make any mistake—"

"Good-bye, then," said she, and she held out her hand. "You know you have given me your word of honor that no human being shall know what you have found out."

And so they parted; but she, instead of going straight to her lodgings in Great Titchfield Street, walked with surprising swiftness to Mrs. Roberts's hotel. She found that buxom dame disengaged, and begged a few minutes' talk of her. When they were in a room together, she quickly asked her companion to tell her all she knew about rheumatic fever. Was it dangerous? Did it last long? Was it painful? What brought it on? And so forth.

Most middle-aged women are extremely proud of their knowledge of diseases, and like to talk about them. Mrs. Roberts, wondering not a little at the extreme anxiety the girl showed, delivered a rambling sort of lecture on rheumatic fever, its causes, symptoms, and results.

"But—but you don't mean to say," said the girl, piteously, "that it *always* leaves behind it the seeds of lung-disease or heart-disease?"

"Oh no, not always."

"One might recover from it, and become quite strong again?" she said eagerly.

"Oh yes, certainly."

"Especially if one were a man with a sound constitution, who had always been in the habit of walking much in the open air—very much indeed. I should think, now, it was quite possible for a man to recover completely, and be quite as well as ever?"

"I believe so," said the landlady, with increasing wonder.

The girl sat silent for a moment or two.

"Is it so very, very painful, Mrs. Roberts?" she said, suddenly, with her hands clasped on her knees before her. "What can you do? Is there any thing you can do? Can you buy any thing for one who has that fever—and take him any thing—"

Some wild notion that she would like to buy all the world, if only that would mitigate the sufferings of her friend, crossed the brain of this millionaire, this Crœsus, who had fifteen pounds sterling in her trunk.

"No," said Mrs. Roberts, looking at her, "not unless he was a poor man; and then you could see that he had a good doctor, and money for the little delicacies an invalid needs."

"He is not that," she said, absently.

A short time thereafter she took her leave, thanking Mrs. Roberts for her kindness. She walked across to Great Titchfield Street, and entered the house. As she was going upstairs she met her landlady's son, a small boy of ten or so, and she said to him,

"Tommy, I want you to do something for me. Come into my room, will you?"

She lighted the gas, got out a sheet of paper, pen, and ink, and placed these on the table.

"Now, Tommy," said she, "I want you to write something for me, like a good boy, and you shall have tea with me afterward."

Tommy did not quite understand, but he obediently sat down at the table, and took the pen in hand.

"Write straight across the page, 'These flowers.'"

"These flowers," the boy wrote.

"'Are sent to Mr. Drummond.'"

"Are sent to Mr Drummond," he wrote in his big, sprawling hand.

"'From one.'"

"From one."

"'Who received.'"

"Who received."

"'Great kindness from him.'"

"Great kindness from him."

She was sitting on the sofa behind him as she dictated the words; he with his head bent over the paper. As she did not continue, he remained waiting for a second or two; and then, as she was still silent, he turned round. He saw then that she had fallen back on the couch, and was lying there as one dead, her face of a ghastly pallor, her arms extended by her side. The small boy was terribly frightened, and he ran out of the room, and down the stairs, until he found his mother.

"She's dead!" he said.

"Who is dead?" the woman cried, with a slight scream.

"The lady. She is lying dead on the sofa."

It was not true, however, that the girl was dead. No such good fortune had befallen her.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN A THEATRE.

MILLER had heard quite recently about Mr. Drummond, but he thought he might as well go up and call upon the Norths, just on the chance of their having received later news. So he went to Euston Square on the afternoon of the day following his interview with Violet, and there he was received by Anatolia.

"Mamma has just left," she said, "to go and see how Mr. Drummond is. I fear he is very ill."

"I must go and call on him too," said the young man, with some compunction. "We were not very good friends when we parted in the Highlands; but one must not mind that at such a time."

"That was a terrible thing, that visit to the Highlands," said Anatolia, with a sigh, for the girl, unlovely as she was of face, had a tender heart. "Poor Violet! We never knew how fond we were of her until she was taken away from us. I suppose it is always so. Papa has never been the same man since; I doubt whether he will ever get over it. He was fonder of her than of any of us. And Mr. Drummond, too. Do you know what his sister told us?—that no one, since Violet was drowned, has ever seen him laugh."

Miller knew that his face was flushed with embarrassment; he got away from that dangerous topic.

"It is true, I suppose, that he brought this fever on by walking about at night?"

"So his sister says. She says he always grew restless in the evening, just about the hour when they used to gather round the fire: that was when Violet was living with them, and when they used to begin to talk and chat. And he could not remain quiet; he would suddenly get up, and put on his boots, and go out—no matter whether it was raining or not—and they never knew at what hour he would return in the morning. Sometimes they found his clothes in the morning soaked through."

"Well, that was enough to kill any body," Miller said, he being a sensible young man, "and he ought to have known, that. It was madness to go on like that—I can not understand it. People are really very foolish about such things. You will find women—delicate women—going without any thing to eat from ten in the morning till half-past seven at night, simply because they won't take the trouble to order luncheon. Now, Mr. Drummond must have known that he was inviting an attack of illness of some sort."

"It was very strange how passionately fond of these people poor Violet was. They seemed to make up the whole of the world to her. And it was so sad to think that she came by her death through their kindness. You know, that is what troubles papa so much, I believe—the thought that he should have allowed her to go away with them by herself; but mamma says to him that, of course, it was a pure accident, such as might have happened to any one, in any circumstances. I believe Mrs. Warrener was always against that bathing."

"Still, it was not the bathing, you know," he said; and then, after a few general inquiries, he left.

He met Violet in Great Marlborough Street, and he could see that she was very anxious and excited.

"How is he?" she said, eagerly.

"He is no worse, anyhow," said the young man. "But look here, Violet. I have been thinking, since I saw you last night, that we can not walk up and down here—I can not talk to you properly; and, besides, some one might see you. Now, I went this afternoon and got a box at the Princess's—it is just over the way; will you go in there for half an hour?"

The proposal had something ghastly in it, from which she instinctively recoiled. To go to a theatre?—she who was wedded to sorrow, and the companion of sorrow.

"I could not do that," she said, almost shuddering.

"But look here, Violet; no one can see you: we shall be able to talk freely; and you need not pay the least attention to the stage."

"They will see me as we go in," she said.

"Not a bit of it. Your veil is so thick that no one would recognize you, unless he is as familiar with your way of walking as I am. We have only to run up a few steps of a stair, and then we are in the box, shut off from every one, and you can sit comfortably while I tell you all the news."

She hesitated; but, after all, it seemed the lesser of the two evils. She did not at all like this business of meeting a young man by appointment, and walking up and down a pavement with him under the flashing glare of the gas-lamps. She might be safer in the theatre. Besides, the excitement of the previous evening had left her feverish and weak; at the present moment she felt almost too tired to stand. And so, with some strange fancies and recollections running through her head, she suffered herself to be conducted into this theatre, led up the stairs, and into the box.

The performances had not begun, and there were few people present; but the orchestra were pounding away at a noisy waltz, as if they would drive some animation into the deserted house. How the great violins groaned, and the little one squealed, and the brazen instruments trumpeted out their staccato notes! To her there was a horrible dissonance in this music; it was a dance of death—the laughter of skulls.

And in the midst of this ghastly noise she heard all that George Miller had to tell her, or, rather, all he considered it prudent to tell her. He did not consider himself bound to tell Violet of what Mrs. Warrener had told Anatolia North; Violet had not sent him on that quest; it was none of his business. She listened with an air of mute misery; her first eager anxiety had been sadly allayed.

The curtain was drawn up; a young man with white trousers and his hat on the side of his head appeared in a drawing-room, and began to flirt with a pert-maid servant, who was laying the breakfast-table. Perhaps it is only in theatircal drawing-rooms that young gentlemen wear their hats, and that people take their meals; but no matter. The dialogue was excessively funny. The gods roared at it. There was a joke about giving a bun to a cat, which was side-splitting.

"But you have not seen him to-day?" said Violet. She was sitting behind the curtain of the box, her head bent down, her hands tightly folded.

"No, I have not," he answered. "I have not been over there since they came back from the Highlands. But I will go over to-morrow, and in the evening I could tell you."

He was more and more rendering himself necessary to her; when he made this proposal, she scarcely remembered that it would involve another appointment.

"It is so miserable not to be able to go and see him for one's self: I would give my life just to shake hands with him once—only once," she said, with a gesture of despair. "Perhaps it would have been better if I had gone away without hearing of his being ill. I can do nothing. And now I cannot go away until I know he is better; I should be haunted with fears from morning till night."

"But where are you going, Violet?" said he, in amazement. There was something about the tone of her voice that struck him.

"I am going away," she said, simply; "away from England, and from every one that I ever knew, so that I shall remain to them as if I were really dead. When I die, they will never hear of it. When I leave England, you too must think of me as one that is dead."

At this moment there was a crash on the stage that startled him. The young man in the light trousers, to escape from the broom of the maid-servant, has jumped out of the window, and apparently fallen through a conservatory. There was a great smashing of glass; and the people in the gallery again screamed with laughter. The fun was too rich.

"Oh, that is folly," he said; but he thought it prudent not to argue with her just at that moment. He would rather endeavor to entangle her into relations with himself; and just then a happy notion occurred to him.

"Look here, Violet. It is only half-past seven. If you are so anxious to know how he is, what do you say to driving over there with me, and I will go in and ask? I could get you a hired carriage in about twenty minutes—that would be so much more comfortable than a cab. You will have to go home first, in any case—to have your tea or dinner, or whatever you have. Then I could call for you."

It was a strong temptation; she was so eager to have authentic news of her friend in his trouble. And then there was some sort of fascination in the idea of being near him—of seeing once more the familiar small house—of looking, even from the outside, at rooms which she had learned to love. Yes, she would go.

"But you must not call for me," she said. "At eight o'clock I will be at the corner of Oxford Street and Great Portland Street: will that do?"

"Certainly."

They left the box. It is to be hoped that the artists on the stage were not insulted: these two who were going away had no intention of expressing their disapproval of that mirth-provoking performance.

Punctually at eight she appeared at the appointed place; and she had not to wait more than a minute or so.

"I have been thinking," she said, when she got inside, "that I must not go near the house. Will you tell the man to drive up Denmark Hill, and put me out at Champion Hill? I will wait for you there."

"I will do whatever you like, Violet," said he. "But I really don't know, mind you, whether I am right in becoming a party to all this secrecy. I never heard of such a thing in my life. I can't understand it."

She did not answer that there were many things which even Mr. Miller, with all his shrewdness and his knowledge of club life, could not understand. She answered, simply,

"You have given me your promise. I hope you are not considering whether you would be justified in breaking that?"

"Oh no, not at all," said he, quickly. "Of course, you have my promise. That's quite right. But really, you know, Violet—"

"Would you rather not drive me over to Champion Hill?" she said. "If it is any trouble to you—if you think you ought not to go—pray stop the man at once. I can walk back to my lodgings."

"Violet," said he, and there was a friendly smile on his face, "you are just the same as ever. Do you remember one drive we took together, long ago? Do you remember proposing to stop the man before we had been ten minutes on the way? You were always proud and quick. Now, you know I will do any thing to serve you. It was in your own interest I remonstrated with you. Why should you go away? Why shouldn't you tell your friends? They would be delighted to forgive you for all the grief they have suffered in the gladness of seeing you again."

The gentleness and friendliness of his speech touched her; but she only said, in a sad and resigned way,

"You do not know all that drove me to take that step; it is no use speaking of that now. Yes, I remember that drive—it seems a long time ago; but I always think of the day as a white one, the air was so clear and full of light. What children we were—quarreling about nothing, and enjoying the mischief of running away! My father was very good to you, in overlooking that escapade. I think he was amused at the audacity with which you went and told him all about it. You did not see him to-day?"

"No."

"Poor papa!"

She remained silent for some time; and by-and-by they got down to Westminster Bridge. It was the first time she had seen the river since her visit to Scotland. Now a faint moon light showed the Houses of Parliament, and the Embankment, and the broad stream in hues of blue and gray; and there were far lines of gas-lamps burning like threaded jewels of gold; and there were rich, soft shadows lying along the houses and wharves of the Surrey side.

"I have seen the river so often like that; it is a beautiful sight," she said, absently. She was thinking that, in the distant country to which she was going, she would be able to conjure up this picture of blue-gray mist and golden stars.

When they drove, too, out by Kennington church, and so onward to Denmark Hill, she seemed to be renewing acquaintance with scenes once familiar to her, and doing so only to bid them good-bye. Perhaps she was looking at them for the last time: or could she not come over once more—just on the eve of her departure—to leave those flowers, and the rudely written message, at the threshold of the house of her friend and her beloved one, as a mute token of farewell?

Under the great trees, up here on the brow of the hill, there was abundant shadow, and she got out from the carriage.

"Sha'n't you be afraid to remain here all by yourself?" said he.

"Not at all."

"I may be some time—"

"Yes," said she, quickly. "I hope you will be able to see him, and tell me how he looks, and what he speaks about. I will wait any time—I will wait an hour, if that is necessary; and indeed I am greatly obliged to you."

He left her, and she continued pacing up and down, under the trees, in the chill night. Then she walked along to the top of Green Lane; and, behold! before her stretched the broad valley, filled with the gray mist of the moonlight, and silent as death. The old refrain came back to her, to deepen the sore pain at her heart: "Far away—in the beautiful meadows—is the house of my home. Many a time I went out from it into the valley. O you beautiful valley—I greet you a thousand times. Farewell—farewell!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN EPITAPH.

Mrs. Warrener came into the room looking pale and tired. She was dressed in deep mourning—that was for Violet. And when she saw this young man standing before her, she was for a moment or two deeply moved. It was in very different circumstances—which his presence now instantly recalled to her—that they had last met.

He made no apology to her for not having visited them before; he felt that any personal matter of his own was too trivial to need mention. He said how sorry he was to have heard that her brother was ill; and how was he now?

"Sit down, Mr. Miller," said the small, pale, anxious-eyed woman. "He is just about the same this evening. He is very low indeed; but the doctor says he must have had a fine constitution, and he is making a good fight. You see, he brought himself down so by these walkings-out at night; and we could not prevent him—"

"Of course, there is no actual danger?" said the young man.

"I think not now," was the answer. "I think he is well on the turn; but his mind wanders a good deal yet. Well, well! some sad changes have taken place since we last saw you, Mr. Miller."

The little woman sighed; it was not alone of her brother she was thinking.

"Yes," said he, rather uncomfortably. He hoped she would not speak about Violet.

"It is only quite recently," she continued, "that I have discovered—well, perhaps there is no use talking about it now. What might have been, if our poor Violet had lived—there is not much use in talking about that now. But it made me very unhappy at the time, to see you and her at cross-purposes. I could see that she was greatly troubled by it. She is at rest now."

"Well, I must not take you away from the sick-room, Mrs. Warrener, if you are attending upon your brother," said Mr. Miller.

"I am not at present," she said—somehow she seemed to be glad of the young man's presence; he was a link between her and happy times. "The nurse has gone in. Lady North was over here to-day. They have given up all hope of finding poor Violet's body. If she were alive, I know where the poor girl would be at this moment. And how my brother talks about her in his rambling fancies—he sees her everywhere, he connects her with every thing. Yes, I made a great mistake about that; I had no idea his love for the girl was any thing beyond a friendly affection; but even if she had lived, what then? The only thing I am sorry for now is that you and she had not made up your misunderstanding before the end."

When she said she knew where Violet would be at that moment, supposing the girl were alive, a sort of superstitious fear overcame him. He could almost imagine her listening outside the window to hear the news of her friend. If some one had knocked at the door just then, he would have jumped up and said, "There is Violet!"

"I suppose I could not see him for a minute or so," he said, for he was determined to execute his commission thoroughly.

"Oh dear, yes," she said, at once. "But I am afraid he will not recognize you. The delirium has been rather bad this evening, though he is not nearly so weak as he was. Will you please leave your hat here?—a black hat always sets him off into fancies about undertakers."

He followed her into the sick-room; and, as they entered, the nurse left. There was no need for the young man to walk so noiselessly; the long, outstretched figure on the bed took no apparent notice of his presence. But young Miller went over to the bed, and took up one of the thin, bony hands, and said,

"I am glad to hear you are getting better, Mr. Drummond."

There was no languid indifference and apathy about this patient. The cheeks were a trifle hollow, but they were flushed as if with some excitement: and there was a brilliant light in the large, restless, scrutinizing eyes; and, as George Miller spoke, an amused smile came to the thin and pale lips.

"You are young Miller, I do believe?" said Mr. Drummond, looking curiously at his visitor.

"Yes. I am glad to hear you have got over the worst now," said the young man, saying what every one is supposed to say to an invalid. "You must pull yourself together now, and fight the illness right out of the house."

"I had a strange dream about you, young Miller," said the sick man, not heeding the counsel, "a very strange dream about you to-day, and about your cigars. Do you remember that big cigar that stretched across the valley from Sydenham Hill all the way to Grove Park; and you couldn't have held it up except for the moonlight helping you—that was when Violet and the rest of us were walking on the ice, and you said that Chamounix was nothing to it. Do you know that stamping out the fire in the end of that cigar was murder—the poor, piteous, small red eye that you have to hunt for, and it comes through the black again, and you kill it and stamp on it: that is murder. These dreams trouble one so! and after you have crept and crept all round the headland—creeping flat through the brackens—and you signal Jimmy to bring the boat along—then all the curlew get up, and a great heron rises, with its long legs hanging down in the air; then just as you have him covered with the gun, and you are trying to pull the trigger, and the trigger won't go off, then down goes the heron into the water, and dives like a merganser, and you never see him again. The water becomes quite blank then; and you may walk day after day along the rocks, and you will see nothing at all there; you will only hear the plashing of the waves, and they know, but they will not give up the secret. It is a terrible thing, the silence of the shores, just after day-break, if you are alone, and looking and looking, and finding nothing but the continual noise of the waves."

His eyes had wandered away by this time; but he again directed his attention to his visitor, and seemed to make some effort to arouse himself.

"Young Miller, why don't you sit down? Sarah, have we no wine in the house?"

"Thank you, I would rather not have any," said the young man. "You must try and get rid of those dreams, Mr. Drummond. Don't pay any attention to them. You know Christmas is coming on now; and you must get well and strong, to have a merry Christmas party."

"Is he coming along?" he said, absently. "The tall white man in the winding-sheet. That is a ghastly sort of figure to come as a guest to a party; and there is snow about him, and he walks through the night—through the night, and then the stars are as silent as the waves are, and they will not give up the secret to you: you may cry to them, and stretch out your hands to them—it is no use at all—"

His sister came over to him, and placed her cool hand gently on his forehead.

"James," she said, "You must not talk any more now. You must be still."

He turned to his visitor, whom he did not seem to recognize now.

"I beg your pardon, sir, if I have been talking too much. It is an old failing of mine—I hope you will forgive me. There was one once who used to like to listen to me—at least I thought so—she is gone away now: perhaps I am too talkative to strangers."

He remained silent for a short time, but only for a short time; for the restless fancy that drove him from topic to topic, from one speculation to another, in his moments of health and sanity, was rendered all the more morbidly active by this disease.

"Sarah," said he, quickly, "I want you to read me that epitaph—I think there is something wrong in it—I am sure there is. I am sorry to give you the trouble; but I must finish it to-night, you know."

To humor him, she took down a card that he had nailed up over the mantel-piece. It was an epitaph on the whole race of publishers. She read it slowly; and from time to time he corrected her accentuation of the Latin.

"I knew it," he said, dreamily, "it is all wrong. That was not what I meant at all. Now, Sarah, take a pen and some paper, and I will tell you what to write down."

"No, no, James," his sister remonstrated; "another time will do very well. You must be still now."

"It will only take a minute," he pleaded. "I have it all ready; I have dreamed it. I knew the other was all wrong."

"Leave it over till to-morrow," said young Miller, gently; but the sick man paid no attention to him.

So Mrs. Warrener got the sheet of paper, and sat down at the small table.

"What shall I write, then, James?"

"It is the epitaph; but not in Latin; for it ought to be known and read by every one. Write now—are you ready, Sarah?"

"Yes, dear."

"The sea that bore her away from us was not half as clear as her clear and beautiful soul."

He paused till the words were down; and then he went on, his look still directed toward her.

"'And the dark softness of her eyes was large, and mild, and generous, like the darkness of the night when it hushes the poor tired children of the world to sleep. Now she has gone, to some of us it seems as if the very light of our life had gone too—' Sarah, why do you cry? The bitterness of it is past now; at least, if it is not, it must be hidden; and we must put a brave face on it; the world shall have no part in the secret, even if it should lie like a fire in your bosom, and burn, and burn, and drive you out into the cold night-air. I think it was last night I was out . . . . and there was a voice I could hear somewhere in the dark—but it was far and far away. . . . Do you know what it said?—'Oh, Willie's gane to Melville Castle, boot and spurs and a''—but it was far away, and there was no laughing in the song. But they had a great deal of laughter in these songs; and in the old time lovers were gay and joyous, and even when he was parting from his sweetheart, what did the jovial fellow say?

"Gae bring to me a pint o' wine,
And fill it in a silver tassie,
That I may drink, before I go,
A service to my bonny lassie!'

That was the gallant way of saying good-bye; but it is all changed now—the poor trembling girl stands in a railway-station, and the whistle of the engine as the train leaves seems to rend her heart in two; and the young man, he stands on the deck of the steamer, and as the engines begin to throb he can see nothing of his sweetheart on shore for the tears rushing into his eyes. The world is very full of all this misery. I don't know how the old people in the old times wrote those merry songs. But there is an end to it—there is an end; and the cruel pain in the heart will leave; and the sound of the waves will no longer haunt one—there will be peace and sleep."

He turned his head away, and lay still; George Miller seized the opportunity of slipping out of the room, and Mrs. Warrener followed him, the nurse returning to her duties.

"It is very sad," said Miller, casting about for some phrase of consolation; "but he does not appear to be suffering much pain."

"Not now; at one time it was dreadful. Did you notice how these fancies about poor Violet run through all he says?"

"Yes, it is very strange—and very sad. Well, I hope, Mrs. Warrener, to hear better news when I call next."

He bid her good-bye, and went out into the chill December air. The moonlight was clearer up here than it had been over the Thames valley: in a few minutes after leaving Mr. Drummond's house he descried Violet slowly pacing along the empty thoroughfare. When he reached her, her anxiety had so tortured her that she was unable to ask him the simplest question. She only stared at his face, as if she would read there what news he had to bring.

"He is very ill, no doubt," said he, "but not in danger—not actually in danger, you know, Violet. He wanders a little, you know, as a feverish person will, when he speaks to you; but he suffers not much pain now, and I hope he has got through all the worst of it."

"Do you mean," said she, slowly, "that he is delirious?"

"Well, yes—"

"And there is nothing one can do—nothing!" she said, almost wildly. "Do you know what it is to have sympathy with one who is ill?—it is this, that if you could save him a single pang, you would gash your wrist through with a knife; and—and I would do that! Oh, it is terrible—terrible! Here we are standing here—in a beautiful night—every thing quiet and pleasant, and both of us well and strong; and there he is lying with that deadly thing trying to poison him, and we are quite helpless! I flung away my friends, my home, every thing I cared for, to save him anxiety and care; now his very life is in danger, and I can do nothing at all!"

She was speaking in a strangely excited way; but he did not fail to take note of these involuntary confessions. Perhaps his own hopes were rather dashed for the time; but he would wait and see.

"It is not quite so bad as that, Violet," said he. "I don't suppose his life is actually in danger now; and—and he does not suffer much pain; and altogether you must hope for the best."

She seemed scarcely to listen to him. She stepped into the carriage, and took her seat in silence, and in silence she was driven across the great world of London. His attempts to interest her in various alien matters met with but little success: there was a great care at her heart; and the shadow of it clouded her brow and troubled her anxious eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PREPARATIONS FOR FLIGHT.

Mr. George Miller had been plunged into all this business with much suddenness, and had had but little time to reflect. When, however, he came to regard his position with care and deliberation, the longer he looked at it, the less he liked it. At first he had considered it to be one of great advantage. He alone knew of this girl's whereabouts—of the very fact of her existence, even; what more natural than that she, homeless, friendless, and penniless, should cling to this one friend, who, in due course of time, would be proud to lead the truant back as his wife? He soon came to see that these speculations were useless. To her he was merely a messenger, a go-between. She was exceedingly grateful to him; but it was only because he brought her tidings of James Drummond. All her interest, her very life, seemed to be wrapped up in this man.

Now, George Miller, being a cool-headed, shrewd, sensible sort of a fellow, when he saw that matters stood thus, began to look with some anxiety, and even annoyance, on the awkward responsibility he had incurred. It was all very well for him to promise not to reveal Violet's secret; for then he only wanted to gain time, that so he might talk her over. But she would not even allow him to argue the matter with her. So it came to this, that he was to be made an accomplice in an act of cruel folly the like of which he had never heard before. That he "could not understand," was to him a sufficient condemnation of Violet's resolve. He did not see the use of all this mystery. She herself was obviously unhappy in going away. Why could she not, like a reasonable person, get into a four-wheeled cab, drive up to Euston Square, declare herself to her father, and have a comfortable luncheon, instead of sitting all day in a cold shop? But no; she would not even hear him speak of it. She had given him, on their first and second meetings, some vague hints as to the causes of her conduct; beyond that, nothing. And while he was inclined to become impatient over what he considered to be her folly, there were times at which he did not even try to protest, for he was overawed by the tragic despair of her face.

If George Miller had no love of mystery, Mr. Edward Dowse had plenty; and despite Miller's reiterated assertions that the Miss Main in that Regent Street place was not the Miss Main whom he had met in by-gone years, young Dowse still clung to the fancy that Miller must know something about the girl.

"Well, she knows somebody in this club," said young Dowse, doggedly.

George Miller was vexed and angry to have Violet spoken of at a club, even under the name of Miss Main; but he dared not show his vexation.

"How do you know that?" said he, lightly.

"From the way she looked whenever the club was mentioned. Oh, I am sure of it; and I shall find out, sooner or later."

"Write a poem about it, Dowse; write a poem about it," said George Miller.

This was sarcasm. Miller had a fine contempt for a man who could sit down in the day-time and bother his brains with piecing rhymes together. Indeed, he did not at all care for the society of Mr. Edward Dowse. He did not like to be seen in the club with a man who wore a Byronic collar, and combed his ridiculously profuse hair down over his face.

Perhaps there was a spice of mischief in the proposal which Edward Dowse placed before his mother, to the effect that she should ask Miss Main, and that he should ask Mr. George Miller, to come down to the Laurels on the same day, without previous intimation of the meeting.

"No, no, Teddy," his mother said, good-naturedly. "That is all your romantic notions. You would find them strangers to each other, and Mr. Miller might not like to meet at dinner a young lady whom he might afterward see at the desk in Regent Street. Not that that is against her, so far as I am concerned, I am sure. I like the girl; she is most ladylike—"

"Oh, you know quite well, mother, she was not brought up to that kind of thing."

"But I'll tell you what I'll do, Teddy, if you like," continued his mother. "I will ask her to spend Christmas-day here. The poor girl must be dull in her lodgings."

Well, Teddy approved of that. He had not the slightest notion in the world of falling in love with Miss Main; but her presence in this remote little country-house would be an agreeable break to its monotony. Who could tell, too, but that some element of the unexpected might be introduced into their Christmas festivities by this mysterious guest? On Christmas-night thoughts and fancies go far away; perhaps, in a sudden moment of confidence, she might be induced to tell them her story. That would tend to redeem the commonplaceness of the evening: a Christmas dinner consisting only of roast turkey, Champagne, and plum-pudding was a poor affair.

But Mr. Dowse, senior, who was commissioned to carry the invitation to Violet, added, or rather prefixed, something on his own account.

"Miss Main," said he, with a sort of facetious heartiness, "do you know you have been looking very unwell lately? Do you know that? Well, we can't have an invalid on our hands; people coming into the place would say that the contemplation of good designs in furniture had a bad effect on the spirits. Come, what do you say to taking a holiday or two, and running down to stay with Mrs. Dowse? You will get a hearty welcome. Come, is it to be a bargain?"

The girl looked up from her desk: she had been reading a newspaper, having nothing else to do at the moment.

"I am sure it is very kind of you, Mr. Dowse, and of Mrs. Dowse too; but I assure you I don't feel at all unwell at present."

"But I assure you I know you are not all right; you look troubled, fatigued. Come, think better of it."

"I could not leave London at present, sir," she said. "I—I have a dear friend who is unwell—"

"I am sorry to hear that," said he. He was surprised. He had understood that she had not a single friend in London. But, taking it for granted that it was some lady friend, he added, "Well, at any time you may think of visiting her, you ought to do so during the day. These cold and misty nights are dangerous."

"Thank you very much," said she: she was glad to have no further demand for explanation.

"And here is another thing. Mrs. Dowse would be very glad if you would spend Christmas-day with us—"

"It is really too good of you—of you both, sir," said the girl, who was very much touched by this spontaneous kindness on the part of people who were practically strangers to her. "I think, however, I must ask you to excuse me."

He regarded her for a moment with some doubt.

"You have some friends, then, with whom you will spend Christmas?"

"N-no, not exactly," she stammered.

"You don't mean to say you prefer to spend Christmas-evening all by yourself in your lodgings?" said Mr. Dowse, with some amazement.

"Perhaps—I—I don't prefer it," she said, with such obvious embarrassment that he resolved not to press the invitation; "but—if you will tell Mrs. Dowse how much I thank her. I am afraid I can not accept her kindness this time."

So there was no more said on that subject in Regent Street. The whole position of the girl, however, was a fruitful topic of speculation, led by Mr. Dowse, junior, in the Berkshire drawing-room of an evening. It was observed, among other things, that she never availed herself of that permission to go and see her sick friend in the day-time.

A few days passed, and a brighter look came to Miss Main's face. She began to regain her old cheerful equanimity; she was as vivacious as ever in discussing those combinations of color and form about which father and son occasionally consulted her. They guessed that her sick friend was getting better. And they were right. That fierce fever had been at last overthrown in its wrestle with a fine constitution. As George Miller carried, from time to time, this news to Violet North, he, too, could notice the glowing light of her face, and the proud gladness of her eyes.

"He will go away from London when the mild spring weather comes in, will he not?" she said. "Away to the South, perhaps? Or is there any air so soft and sweet as that in the Western Highlands? Perhaps he will go away in the *Sea-Pyot* again—to Loch Salen and Ornsay, and Kyle Rhea."

"And you?" said he, "where shall you be then?"

Her eyes grew distant, but not sad.

"No one will know that; and no one will care. And you must go and become great friends with Mr. Drummond again. When I think of you, I shall think of you always as a holiday party; and either you are out on the hills shooting with old Peter, or else you are away in the yacht, sailing round the islands, and getting into quiet bays in the evening. Mind you, I shall always think of you as having bright and beautiful weather, and of your being very merry."

"And what shall we think of you?"

"Nothing at all," she said, quite cheerfully. "You can not always be mourning for dead people."

"I suppose you have not considered," he said, with some bitterness, "what my position will be. I shall see your relations and friends still saddened by thinking of your death, and know that I could with a word relieve them from this grief, and be unable to do so. I shall see them wearing black, and become a party to a hoax—"

"All that will pass by," she said; "it can not last long; and poor Anatolia will be glad to get out of black, because it does not suit her complexion. Poor Anatolia! I suppose she speaks quite kindly of me now?"

"She does indeed."

"And Lady North too?"

"Certainly."

"There, now," she said, with a sad smile, "don't you see what good I have done already? When I was with them—when I was alive—I was the cause of all sorts of quarreling and ill-temper; now they have forgotten all that: I have no doubt they would put some flowers on my grave, if only they knew where to find it."

He could find nothing at all jocular in the affair; but his anxiety and embarrassment at this moment arose from selfish motives, rather than from any generous desire to restore Violet to her friends. As each day passed, he saw the time of her intended flight coming nearer; and grew more and more to dread the responsibility that had been thrust on him. He did not like having his hands cumbered with a mystery. For the rest of his life he would have to become a practiced hypocrite in all his relations with some dozen persons whom he would be constantly meeting. All this annoyed him; and he knew that in a short time his last chance of protest would disappear.

In fact, on this very evening things reached a climax. Just before they parted, Violet paused for a moment, and said to him, with some earnestness,

"You must let me thank you most warmly for all this kindness you have shown me. I shall never forget it."

"Well, mind you," said he, "I have expressed no approval of your conduct. I think you are very wrong. I did what you asked me; but—but I am not responsible—"

"I understand," she said, quickly. "The responsibility is mine. Well, I am going to ask you for another favor. Will you lend me a hundred pounds?"

"A hundred pounds!" he said; but it was not the amount of the demand that caused his astonishment.

"Yes," she said, calmly. "I will return it to you when I can; but if you lend it to me, it may be some time before I can repay you. It will be a great favor. I have been saving up money from my earnings to take me out of England, so that

I should escape the risk of further discovery; but it is a slow process. If you lend me this money, I could start at once. I am anxious to go, now that I know Mr. Drummond is better."

The young man remained silent. His first impulse was to say, "You shall have a thousand!" for he could not brook the idea of her considering him mean. Had he been better acquainted with the girl's nature, he would have known that such an idea could never have occurred to her. However, a moment's reflection checked this impulse; for he saw how the loan of this money would involve him more deeply than ever in a responsibility which he was anxious to repudiate altogether.

"You must give me time to think about that," said he; and then he added, hastily, "Of course, you know, Violet, it isn't the money. You might have that, or any thing else of mine, and welcome; but—but—"

"It is merely a question of time," she said, calmly. "I am leaving England, and I shall never return to it. If you lend me this money, I shall go a little sooner, that is all. If you don't, I must wait."

"Yes," said he, with considerable embarrassment. "But then, you see, I am helping to render it impossible for your friends to reclaim you. There is always the chance—"

"How can there be any chance, if you do not tell them? And I have trusted to your honor as regards that."

"There is always the chance, though," he said, stubbornly. "Look at the chance that threw me in your way. Don't you see, Violet, that the Dowses know quite well you were not brought up to be a clerk? They know you belong to some good family—that there is a secret about it. And, of course, they will go on talking until they run against somebody who knows you—just as young Dowse did in my case."

"That is the greater reason why I should get away at once."

"But it is the very reason why I should not help you; because I believe you are acting wrongly; and I don't like to have any part in it."

"Then I must wait," she said, in rather disappointed tones. "Perhaps Mr. Dowse would lend it to me; he is a very generous man."

"Give me till to-morrow, Violet," said Miller. "Or let me see. It is the night after to-morrow I have to tell you about Mr. Drummond?"

"Yes," she said; "I hope that will be the last time I shall have to trouble you."

"I will tell you about the money then."

They parted; and he went home to his rooms in Half Moon Street with some serious trouble on his mind. It was quite clear that, now Mr. Drummond was getting better, she would, if she were given this money, leave England at once. His aiding her in this project was an exceedingly grave matter. On the other hand, his personal pride was touched. Could he at any time have believed that Violet North would condescend to ask him for a sum of money, and that he would refuse her? Did she think he was afraid of not having it back again? She had spoken of Mr. Dowse as a generous man: was there not some contrast lurking in her thoughts?

Then he began to argue out the matter on a different line. If he lent her the money, he was not responsible for the application of it. The gunsmith who sells a man a revolver with which a murder is subsequently committed is no accessory in the crime. He had protested with all his might against this project of hers. After all, and in any case, he was not going to have it said of himself, by himself, that an old friend of his had demanded the loan of a paltry hundred pounds, and been refused.

On the evening on which he was to see Violet—for the last time, according to her expressed wish—he went over to James Drummond's house, and made the usual inquiries. The answer was in every way favorable. Though the patient was still exceedingly weak, still he was slowly getting on toward recovery; and would he care to go in and see his sick friend for a few minutes?

"Well, young Miller," said Mr. Drummond, "have you come to play the Good Samaritan again? Young men of your age ought to be at the theatre, and balls, and that kind or thing, instead of visiting sick-rooms. Or are you fond of tragedy? only there would scarcely have been any thing tragic in the death of such a frail and helpless victim as myself. Look at my hands. I believe the executioner took pity on me even after he had my head on the block—gave me a sort of parting kick, as it were, as a poor devil that wasn't worth wasting his strength on. Sit down, and tell me what is going on. I am not allowed to read yet, and my sister and Amy—well, you know how women begin to read the newspapers to you—I believe they would begin with the advertisements, and then go on to the police news."

The large, fine eyes were as keen and bright as ever, but there was nothing in them of that restless fire which Miller had seen on his first visit. And the quick intelligence of this strange invalid was as much on the alert as ever; though there was a tired and pale look on his face, and his emaciated hands lay helpless on the white coverlet.

Young Miller told him something of what was going forward in the outside world, and he showed great interest in it. But what struck his visitor as most peculiar in this random conversation was the fashion in which Mr. Drummond managed to introduce, on more than one occasion, and especially when his sister was in the room, references to the delirium from which he had suffered, and the necessity of persons guarding themselves against the presumption that any thing said during delirium must have some basis of fact behind it.

"Can't you imagine frightful mischief arising," he said, "from some foolish wife believing that certain things uttered by her husband when he was in a delirious state must be partly true, or founded in truth—that he had committed some crime, or example? Don't you think that it is some small mistake of this sort that often leads up to some dreadful tragedy, apparently without explanation? Now, take the case of a husband who is annoyed by the pertinacious curiosity of his wife, who is continually prying into his correspondence about the most commonplace affairs. To punish her he forges one or two letters, clear evidence of an intrigue, and places them in his desk. What does she do? Why, go out and drown herself; and there you have a tragedy arising out of a mere joke. It is only the whipper-snapper in criticism who is always crying out for a grand and tremendous motive, take my word for it. The greatest tragedies of life arise out of the most trivial things. You know the most appalling tragedy in the world—the destruction of the great host of the Nibelungen, who marched away from the Rhineland to be the guests of King Etzel and his revengeful wife—what did that arise out of?—only a taunt flung at one angry woman by another, which was immediately disavowed, too, by the first woman's husband. You don't know that I once wrote a tragedy?"

"No."

"I did. It has mingled with the elementary forces of nature by this time, for I burned it. And another objection was about the 'unities.' Gracious goodness! do you find any of the great masters, when they look abroad on the beautiful and diverse world, limiting themselves to such material as is necessary to some small and mechanical plot? I think it is the odd characters—the people who have no business there—that I love the most; for unless the author loved them too, he would not go out of his way to drag them in. What on earth has Autolycus to do with the plot of 'A Winter's Tale?'—and yet

I don't know any body I have such a sneaking fondness for as Autolycus. I wish he lived in the parish of Camberwell. He should dine with me every day, and the spoons would be at his disposal. Then look at the First Grave-digger in 'Hamlet:' how could we do without the Grave-digger?"

"Not very well," said Miller, with a modest smile; "we must have him, sooner or later."

"Young Miller," observed the recumbent invalid, "when you are bent on making jokes, please to remember that I have just missed making the acquaintance of the grave-digger by a hair-breadth, and that I may have suddenly to turn round and shake hands with him, thanking him beforehand for allotting me so much of his valuable space, as the people say who write to the newspapers. Then there is the melancholy Jacques—I have always had a great regard for my namesake; but I don't see that he affects the action of the story very much. The 'unities—'"

"But how did they criticise your tragedy, if it was never published?"

"Why, don't you know that there are critics who buffet your book before it is published, and critics who jump on it afterward? My beautiful tragedy suffered so much from the first that I determined that it should not reach the second. I liberated it. Now I can imagine portions of it floating as down on a butterfly's wing; and other portions appearing in the petal of a primrose; and others forming part of the pink flush in a young girl's cheek. My tragedy will never die. If I had published it now, what would have been the result? I should know that, although I bought in every copy I could lay my hands on, the people at the British Museum would tenaciously cling to that evidence of my stupidity. I will admit that my hero was an ass—and a sonorous, self-conceited ass, too. Let's see—what was his name?"

But here Mrs. Warrener broke in upon this random talk by entering the room with some medicine in her hand. He took the glass from her, and swallowed the stuff.

"Another compliment to my doctor," he said: "I take it only to please him—I am certain it has not the least effect upon me. But if a man carries you across a river, and then tells you he was able to do it because he had a tobacco-stopper in his pocket, you are bound to respect the tobacco-stopper."

"You seem to be getting on very well," said young Miller, cheerfully.

"My great ambition," said the invalid, "is to get a white collar on—a regularly starched, stiff, stuck-up collar, as hard as iron, and as white as snow. I have got so tired of these half-tinted, wretched, soft, cotton things I have been swathed in—"

"Well, James," said his sister, "I hope when you get better you don't mean to be more particular about your collars and shirts than before, for indeed there was never any pleasing you. You don't care what sort of coat you wear, nor what sort of hat, but your linen and your boots, there is no pleasing you with them."

"And I am looking forward, too, to the first draught of bitter ale I am allowed. Do you remember that sensation—the first draught at luncheon on the first day of the shooting, after all the heat and toil? No, you were not up with us on the 12th."

He grew silent after that, and thoughtful. Young Miller, with some words of hope and encouragement, took his leave, and made his way across London to the neighborhood of Regent Street.

It was the last time he was to see Violet, and he carried in his pocket the sum of money which was to free her from the necessity of remaining longer in London. Nay, he carried double that sum, for, he said to himself, if there was mischief to be done by the one hundred pounds, no greater could be done by two hundred; and he would show her that it was not the value of the money that had made him pause. And yet, as he walked up and down Great Marlborough Street (she had refused to go again into the theatre) in expectation of her, he was not a little anxious and agitated. The chances of any one now interfering to relieve him from the responsibility he had incurred were small indeed. She would start at once; how could any body trace her after she left New York? When he gave her that promise, he was convinced he could talk her out of a determination which he considered to be the height of folly; he had failed in that, and now he saw no prospect of her releasing him at all.

The question now was, Ought this promise to be kept? Young Miller was not much of a casuist; but he had some shrewd common sense. He knew there were occasions on which people might legitimately do something not quite "straight." There were innocent forms of deception. He thought this was too bad. It wasn't quite fair to him or to any body. She ought not to expect that the temporary promise was to last forever. As he walked up and down, he pretty nearly worked himself into the conviction that, at all risks, he ought to go and tell the girl's father.

Now, if he had had some male confidant of his own stamp, with whom he could have debated this question, there can be little doubt that he would have gone and told the girl's father. His friend would have said to him :

"Oh, look here, Miller, you can not let the girl go like that. If your conscience is tender about your promise, you must do evil, that good may come. Lots of people do that. You tell lies to sick people to make them hope. This is all nonsense : go away and tell the girl's father at once."

Nay, if the promise had been given to a man, under similar circumstances, it is probable that Miller, without any counsel, would so have acted. But it was different with a girl, and that girl Violet North. He could imagine the look of contempt with which she would hear that he had broken his word. He was afraid of her scorn. In the midst of these deliberations, Violet appeared.

"He is still going on favorably?" she said, gently. He had been so occupied in thinking of her anger that he was surprised by the sad sweetness of her voice.

"Oh, first-rate!" said he. "Talking away as fast as ever—it is no use urging him to be quiet. And I suppose there is no great harm in talking; it is the thinking that is the matter; for his brain still has some symptoms of feverishness left, and goes on at such a pace that he can't get sleep. That is weakness, you know—feverishness; a man can't sleep well unless he has exercise. But in other respects he is going on wonderfully well."

Then there was an awkward pause.

"Violet," said he, with some embarrassment, "I have brought you the money. Since you have asked it, here it is; and if you are really going, one hundred pounds is not enough. I have brought you two hundred pounds."

"I am very grateful to you," she said, as she took the envelope containing the notes. "I will send it to you back again by degrees; and I know you won't hurry me."

At this moment a sudden thought flashed into his mind that had never occurred to him before. If she posted these installments from time to time, would not he thus be able to get some approximate notion of her whereabouts in America? That was something, but not much, considering the vow under which she would leave him.

"Now, Violet," said he, "you are free to go; and I suppose this will be the last chance I shall have of begging you to consider what you are doing."

"I have considered," she said, sadly.

"To tell you the truth," said he, rather excitedly, "I have been considering too; and really, if it comes to that, I don't know that I am right in—in—"

"Do you mean," she said, calmly, "that you have been considering whether you will break your word of honor?"

"Well," he said, with some compunction, "I—I—understood it was to be temporary."

"I had no such understanding," she replied, "nor did you say any thing about that."

"It is very hard—" he was beginning to say, when she interrupted him.

"Pray, let us part friends," she said, with a sudden appeal in her voice. "You have been very kind to me—be kind now!

"And you won't even let me know where you are to be found in America, suppose any thing were to turn up?"

"No, she said. "I am to be as one dead to you, and to all here. In a year or two it will not matter; you will have forgotten. And before that, too, I must think of you all as happy and enjoying yourselves, as I told you before—shooting wild duck, going to the Royal Academy, dining with Lady North. In every thing that may happen to you, I shall always think of you as I hope and pray you may always be—pleased, and happy, and contented. Now, good-bye. I am more grateful to you than I can tell you. You have been kind to me—"

She was gone; he was left standing there, bewildered. Somehow, though there was not much sentiment in his nature, he felt sick at heart. It was hard to lose this beautiful friend, who had for a time been mixed up with his boyish dreams. He pictured her going out alone to the unknown world of America, not one human being there to meet her and take her by the hand. He thought of her lonely life in that far country, of the years adding to her loneliness—for he had a sort of feeling that she would never marry—until the final night came, and she would pass away without one of her own people or her old friends near her at that awful moment. His dinner at the Judæum that night nearly choked him. His acquaintances there were convinced that he had been heavily hit by the sudden fall in Costa Ricas.

Next morning Violet sought an opportunity of speaking with Mr. Dowse in private.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Dowse, but would it be convenient for you to let me leave at the end of the month?"

"To leave altogether?"

"Yes, sir," she said, humbly.

Mr. Dowse was surprised, and perhaps a trifle offended. He knew he had dealt generously by this girl; and here she was wanting to leave at little more than a week's notice.

"I hope you have not found the situation disagreeable, Miss Main?" said he, somewhat stiffly.

"Oh no," she said, "on the contrary, you have been most indulgent to me."

"Is it a question of salary?"

"No—certainly not," she said. "I—"

"Perhaps you have another situation in view?"

"I have not," she said, earnestly. "I wish to leave England—that is all. I must go. If it would be convenient for you, Mr. Dowse, I would willingly forfeit a month's salary—"

The moment she had uttered the words she felt sorry.

"I don't think, Miss Main," said he, "that there has been much monetary dispute between us. I am sorry you feel it necessary to leave England; but, if it is so, well, I need scarcely say that we shall not attempt to bind you by any engagement. Perhaps it would be impertinent if I asked you what your plans are?"

"I have none at all," she said, simply. "I am going to America."

He looked at her curiously; he began to believe there might be something in the nonsense his son had been talking about this mysterious stranger.

"Well, well, Miss Main," said he, cheerfully, "you are adventurous; but you have courage. And so you have resolved to leave us? Well, you know, you must come down and bid Mrs. Dowse good-bye."

This worthy person, having a suspicion that the girl was committing a mistake, was of opinion that nobody could talk her over like Mrs. Dowse.

"What do you say, now? Won't you change your mind about Christmas?"

"Thank you, sir, I can not do that. But I shall be very glad to go down and bid Mrs. Dowse good-bye. Would next Saturday be convenient?"

"The day after Christmas?"

"Yes."

"Certainly it would. You won't mind coming down to

Windsor Station by yourself; as we shall all be down in the country from the Friday to the Monday. We will meet you at the station—that is, if we are not drowned in the floods before then. We are living in the middle of a lake at present."

And so it was settled that Violet should go down on the Saturday to bid good-bye to her friends at The Laurels. In the mean time she made all her preparations for her departure. She booked her place on board one of the transatlantic steamers; and got her luggage ready. On the night before Christmas-day she went to Covent Garden and bought some flowers—not a bouquet of wax-like blooms, but a basket of primroses, and violets, and snowdrops; a vision of springtime in the dead of winter. Then she went home; and took out a rudely written piece of paper; and there were tears running down her face like rain as she read the words: "These flowers are sent to Mr. Drummond from one who received great kindness from him."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"SOUL TO SOUL!"

ALL that Christmas-day, until the afternoon, she spent in her lodgings, sometimes reading, sometimes adding a bit to her packing, sometimes staring out of window into the misty street, where the shops were shut, and the people who passed wore their Sunday clothes. She thought the cold, dismal day would never end.

Her landlady, pitying her forlorn condition, came up and made bold to ask her whether she would not have something extra for her dinner, seeing it was Christmas-day. Miss Main replied that she would be out in the afternoon, and would return to supper, as usual, in the evening. Then Mrs. Roberts called, and frankly invited the girl to go over and have dinner with herself and a small party of guests. Miss Main thanked her friend warmly; but said she had an engagement.

In the afternoon, as it was drawing toward dusk, she put on her shawl and bonnet and a thick veil, and went out. The gaslamps were being lighted in the misty twilight. Notwithstanding the heavy rains that had recently fallen, the atmosphere was cold and raw; occasionally the yellow light from the lamps sparkled on the frosty pavements; she vaguely knew the roads would be slippery outside the town, whither she was going.

It seemed strange to her to look at the people who were passing—silent, content, occupied only in thinking of the present moment, of the cold, or the hour, or the condition of the crossing. They were few in number; the streets were more deserted than on a Sunday; over the closed shops she saw the windows lighted up: there, doubtless, were pleasant gathering of friends, doubtless having a chat and a laugh together before the festivities of the evening began. She walked on—scarcely knowing what to think of all the world around her—until she got an omnibus bound for Victoria Station; and that she entered, finding herself the only passenger.

It was otherwise at the station; for here and there were a good many people, mostly young men in evening-dress, who were obviously going out to parties in the suburbs. They were in groups, laughing and jesting. She sat in a corner of the dimly lighted waiting-room until it was time for the train to start.

There were two or three friends, bound for the same house, in the carriage with her. They were joking merrily. They were young Germans, and a trifle boisterous; but she forgave the boys their high spirits—was it not Christmas-time? As she drew near Denmark-hill Station her heart began to beat more rapidly. She recognized the voice of the porter calling out as the train stopped; she hurried by him—scarcely looking at the wreaths of evergreens hung all around—for she was afraid he might remember her. It was the first Christmas she has omitted to pay a half-crown toll for these pleasant decorations.

Up here the air was keener and clearer; a star or two were faintly visible in the gray overhead; the pavements sparkled with the frost; a great silence lay over the black trees in the gardens. And through these trees and bushes she caught glimpses of glowing windows; here and there a blind lifted or a curtain pushed aside showed her brilliant rooms, and green decorations, and figures—doubtless those of children—dancing; and she heard the sound of merry music. One large gate stood open; she went in a step or two, and stood by the laurel bushes. Was not this "Sir Roger de Coverley?" There were screams of laughter, and children's voices; through the white curtains she could see that picture of joyousness within. When she turned away, there were tears running down her face. It was her last look at an English Christmas.

At length she got into the Grove; and it was with slow steps, and with a great fear in her heart, that she drew near the house she had been wont to approach with gladness and confidence. She looked all round; there was not a human being visible in the thoroughfare. She ventured to go up as far as the house, on the other side of the road, and stood for a second or two looking at it. What she saw was plain enough—the peaked roofs, the diamond-paned windows, the curious little veranda, and the lamp swinging over the door under the porch: what she experienced then of the wild anguish of farewell no human being will ever know.

She pictured to herself the group within, in the small dining-room—the sick man, lying on his couch, pretending to be brave and strong so as to help along the simple festivities, perhaps raising a glass into his lean hand and calling on them to drink a glass to their absent friends. She would not be included even in that. But surely they would think of her on this night of all nights in the year, and they would think not unkindly of her, for the sake of old times—

She could not bear this desperate sobbing; it was like to break her heart. And yet it was hard to tear herself away. There was but a short distance now between her and all that she loved upon earth; soon the great Atlantic would be between them.

" Good-bye—good-bye ! " her heart said to them, in its yearning love and agony. " If you knew I was so near, you would come to me—you would ask me to go in—I should not be a stranger. Perhaps there is an angel watching over that house, to bring peace to it, and gladness. He knows why I go away. Oh, my dearest friends, good-bye—good-bye for the last time ! "

She walked away, her head bent down, her breast heaving with its sobs. She went by those brilliantly lighted windows, whence the sound of music issued, like some mute ghost of misery.

She did not walk far, however; for she had not accomplished the chief part of her mission. After a time, when she had quieted herself somewhat, she began to look around for some one who would become her messenger; but it was some time before she saw a single human being, the thoroughfares were so deserted. At last, however, she heard a small boy approach, whistling. She asked him if he would take the basket she held in her hand, with a note, and leave them at a certain door. He looked curiously at her. She said she would give him a shilling, and he at once consented. So she walked back with him to the Grove, intrusted him with the flowers and the folded piece of paper, and then hurried away in the gloom.

James Drummond was lying on the sofa in the drawing-room, propped up by the cushion, and Amy was at the piano, playing to him. His sister entered the room, carrying something, and said,

"What a strange thing! Here is a basket of flowers for you, James—and this bit of paper, which was handed in with them."

Her face was quite bright. She thought it was a kindly action. She handed him the note, which he opened.

The next moment she was startled by a quick cry. She turned at once, and to her horror saw her brother apparently making a fierce attempt to rise from the couch, while his face was wild and white.

"What is it, James?"

"Sarah, Sarah!" he cried, holding out the paper with a shaking hand, "she is alive! I tell you that Violet is alive! I know—I know—only herself would think of this! It is a message from soul to soul! Violet—"

He sunk back, speechless and exhausted.

"Yes, James," said his sister, soothingly. She was dreadfully alarmed by this wild scene; and she jumped to the conclusion that he had lapsed again into delirium. "Perhaps they are from Violet—you must be still now."

"Woman, woman!" he cried, with still another frantic effort to rise, "don't stand there! Send after her! Send after the messenger! Who brought them?"

"A boy," replied Mrs. Warrener, thoroughly bewildered, for her brother did not appear to be delirious, though he spoke these incoherent words,

"Send after him—quick, quick! Ask him where he got the flowers—and the message."

She ran at once out into the night. If this were madness, it would soothe him to know she had obeyed him. Or was there some wild possibility—some subtle sense—in his over-excited brain?

Well, she had not far to go; for there was the boy, under the gas-lamp, examining the shilling and biting it with his teeth, to prove that his good luck was not a delusion.

"Boy," she said, hurriedly, "you brought the flowers to our door?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said suddenly plunging the shilling into his pocket.

"Who gave you them? Where did you get them?"

"The lady gave me them—I met her round the corner."

"What was she like? A young lady?"

"Yes."

"And tall?"

"Yes, and she wore a thick veil; and I think she was crying."

Mrs. Warrener began to tremble in every limb.

"Which way did she go?"

"That way."

He pointed away down the dusky thoroughfare, which was now silent and empty. Mrs. Warrener went back to the house. Her steps were not very firm; and her face, as she entered the room, was as white as that of her brother, who stared at her with eager, excited eyes.

"Oh, James—is it possible? The boy—the boy says it was a young lady who gave him the flowers—a tall young lady—she was veiled—and he thought she was crying."

The sick man sunk back on the cushion.

"Violet is alive and in London, Sarah," he said, faintly. "You must find her— Alive!—Our Violet here a few minutes ago—" And then he murmured to himself, as he turned his head away from the glare of the light, "Oh, Madcap, Madcap, what have you done!"

CHAPTER XL.

UNINVITED GUESTS.

There are moments of agonized thinking that shorten one's life by years. Mrs. Warrener would have appealed to to her brother to come to her aid to put in order the wild suggestions that his words had conjured up, to resolve the terrible doubts which now flashed in upon her; but he lay there silent and exhausted, that scene of excitement having obviously been too much for the feeble energies of an invalid. She was left to face the situation alone.

"Mamma, is it possible—do you think it possible, Violet can be alive?" said her daughter, whose face was as pale as her own.

"Child, child! how can I tell?" the mother replied, in a bewildered way.

There were the flowers on the table, and the rudely written message; but it was the interpretation given to them that was the strange and terrible thing, like some dream-warning come true, or the vision seen by a dying man. There could be no doubt that some tall young lady had left the flowers; was it really true, then, that Violet had been all this time living in London, thinking about them as they about her, perhaps coming occasionally, in her love of madcap ways, to have a peep at them, herself unseen?"

Then her face grew hot, and shame and indignation were at her heart.

If, after all, the girl had run away from the Highlands, why? Was it to please herself with her school-girlish romanticism? She could not quite believe that of Violet. But she angrily conjectured that if it really turned out the girl was alive and well, it would be discovered she had run away to rejoin her former sweetheart; and that all this long grief and regret had been visited upon her friends simply because she had not the courage to declare her intention in the Highlands. And the anger in Mrs. Warrener's gentle bosom was not directed against Violet—whose wayward ways were known—but against George Miller, who had seen their sufferings, and still held his peace; who had come ever there and hypocritically talked of the lost Violet; who, having three or four years before pretty nearly compromised the girl's reputation, had now most thoroughly succeeded in doing so, and that for life.

"James," she said, warmly, "if Violet is alive, she must have run away to go to Mr. Miller. What else could prompt her to do such a mad, thing?"

"That is no matter," the sick man said, gently; "it is enough that she is alive. Go to her, Sarah. Tell her we are glad to know she is alive; and see whether she is well and happy. That is all right. Don't blame her for what has been done."

"But where am I to find her? Oh, James, all this is a sort of wild dream! I don't know what has come over us to-night—on Christmas-night—that we are thinking such harsh things about our poor Violet."

Her heart went up in a prayer for forgiveness. The memory of that wayward girl had become a pure and beautiful memory. Surely, if her gentle spirit, on this Christmas evening, were looking down on the household that she used to love, she would regard with a gentle pity and forbearance this black nightmare that had come over them.

"Mamma," said Amy Warrener, with tears runing down her face, "if there is any chance at all, we must try to find her. Oh, to think of getting our Violet back! Let us go to Mr. Miller, if you think he will know—if there is any chance at all, mamma—"

Mrs. Warrener looked at those flowers once more, and she thought of the mysterious visitor.

"Shall we go and ask Mr. Miller?" she said to her brother.

"Yes, yes!" he said, eagerly; "that before every thing. You will find him at his father's house to-night, at Sydenham Hill; Amy knows the place. Perhaps—no, he could not have been so cruel—but he is a young man; he has plenty of money and time; he will help you to seek for her. And when you find her, ask no questions of her, Sarah. Let the girl have her own secrets. What she did she was compelled to do, be sure of that. And do not ask her to come here unless she offers to do that. See that she is well, and tell her that we are glad to hear news of her—that is all."

"How sure your uncle is that she is alive!" said Mrs. Warrener to her daughter, as they hurriedly went away to dress themselves for the plunge into the cold air. "I hope it is not all some strange dream of his, such as he had when he was delirious; you remember the night he fancied Violet was sitting in the easy-chair, and that she was his wife, and going over the housekeeping accounts. Any one would have believed it was true; he was so anxious she should not hurt her eyes with the accounts, and the way he begged her forgiveness for being unable to give her more money—"

"But this is quite different, mamma. There is no delirium in it at all; and oh, I hope it is true!"

When the maid-servant was ordered to put back the dinner—the Christmas dinner—to nine o'clock, she thought her mistress had gone out of her wits. She went down and complained to her colleague in the kitchen that the house had been all at sixes and sevens since the master and missis came back from Scotland; that there never was a laugh in the place now, ever since Miss Violet was drowned; and that altogether she felt so miserable and wretched that she meant to give warning. Meanwhile Mrs. Warrener and her daughter, considering the scarcity of trains on such a day, had re solved to walk over to Sydenham Hill; and so, with such speed as the slippery roads permitted, they went along to Green Lane, descended into those Dulwich meadows in which Violet had laid the scene of her school-girl novel; crossed the meadows by narrow paths, which were dark enough on this dusky night and at length got into the broad highway that was lighted by gas-lamps. The two figures in black, both veiled, were about the only persons visible on this Christmas evening. As Violet had done, but with less oppression of heart, they glanced in at the brilliantly lighted windows they passed from time to time, and heard the merry sounds of music and dancing.

But of all the houses they saw on that dark night none was so brilliant as that at which they finally paused, up here on the brow of the hill. It was a blaze of light in all directions, including a spacious conservatory, the luminous pink and white blinds of which were visible from the gate. The glass-covered portico leading up to the door was lighted by many-colored lamps; it was clear that high festivities were going on within.

Now at the moment when these two visitors presented themselves dinner was over, but the ladies had not left the dining-room, and the butler was still there busy with the wine; while the only person who happened to be in the hall when the bell was rung was the sister of one of the servants, a young girl who had been engaged as an auxiliary for the evening. She opened the door.

"Is Mr. Miller at home—I mean young Mr. Miller?" said Mrs. Warrener.

"Yes, ma'am," said the girl, rather timidly. She thought it was an unusual time for a visit.

"Will you please take my card to him, and say I should like to see him for a moment? I will not detain him."

The girl took the card. But she could not leave one who was so obviously a lady at the door; much less could she ask her to take a seat in the hall. On her own responsibility, therefore, she asked the two visitors if they would step into the drawing-room, while she took the card to Mr. Miller. Mrs. Warrener and her daughter entered.

Those two black figures looked strange in this great room, which was all a blaze of satin, white, and gold. In anticipation of the ladies coming in from the dining-room, the candles had been lighted up round the walls, and there was a huge fire throwing pink colors on the gleaming white tiles of the hearth. Then the decorations: the long festoons of ivy leaves, the devices in holly and mistletoe, the beautiful flowers placed around the spacious apartment—all this was a sight to see, if the two strangers had been thinking of such things.

Mr. George Miller had earned some little reputation as an orator down Sydenham way, where the people are much given to dinner-parties and other local festivities at which healths are proposed. How this Scotch custom got transferred to Sydenham is at present a mystery. Among certain classes of Scotch people it is almost impossible for half a dozen persons to dine together without some one at the end of dinner rising up and making a speech about some one else, who, in his turn, feels bound to propose some other guest's health. Whether any colony of a people, who, however taciturn in general, are prone to gabbling after dinner, ever settled in the neighborhood of Sydenham, I leave to antiquarians to discuss; but it is the fact that the young men of Sydenham are, above all others, trained from their youth to propose, and respond to, at a moment's notice, such toasts as "The Ladies," "Absent Friends," and the like, and that they acquire this enviable gift by practice in comparatively small social circles.* However, on this occasion George Miller had some excuse for being on his feet. He was proposing the health of his niece, Miss Maud Leicester, who had just been brought in in a high chair with a bar across. Miss Maud paid not the least heed to all the beautiful things that were being said about her, but was making ferocious attacks on an orange which she found much difficulty in holding. She looked up, however, when every body called out her name and drank a glass of wine to her, and just at the moment the small maid-servant entered the room, and placed Mrs. Warrener's card before the young master.

Mr. Miller was alarmed, and looked it. He begged to be excused for a moment or two, and left the room. When he found Mrs. Warrener and her daughter awaiting him, he hurriedly asked if any thing were the matter with Mr. Drummond.

"No," said Mrs. Warrener, making a desperate effort to remain calm, "my brother is getting on very well. It is about another matter. Mr. Miller, do you know whether Violet North is alive?"

The suddenness of the question startled him; he had not been prepared for it. He only stared at her in confusion and bewilderment; he had not an answer ready.

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* I am informed that commercial travelers are greatly addicted to the making of speeches after dinner. This may arise from their having so frequently to dine together in country inns, with no other form of intellectual exercise to fall back upon.

"Oh, Mr. Miller," cried Amy Warrener, with a pathetic entreaty in her voice, "I can see you know where she is—she is alive! You will tell us where Violet is?"

"Really—" said he, and then he stopped in vexatious embarrassment; for, short of a downright lie, there was scarcely a word he could say that would not commit him, while silence would be nearly as fatal to the promise he had given Violet. "Really—this is most extraordinary— Violet North alive— And you come to me!"

"Yes, we come to you," said Mrs. Warrener, bitterly. "Can you deny that she is alive? Can you deny that you have kept this knowledge to yourself?—for what purposes I can not tell—and have looked on at our misery, and the misery of her relatives, without a touch of pity? Oh, I am ashamed to think of it!"

Well, George Miller began to grow angry. It became clear that, however Violet's friends had come to know of her existence, the whole pack of them would be down upon him—he, poor innocent, having nothing more to do with the matter than the man in the moon. It was too bad. Here he was about to be accused of all sorts of things, with his mouth shut by that promise so that he could not say a word in his defense.

"I don't understand you, Mrs. Warrener," said he; "what makes you think that Violet is alive?"

"Can you deny that you know she is alive?" said Mrs. Warrener, warmly.

"Oh," said he, with an uneasy laugh, "this is madness—pure madness. If I had known she was alive, why should I have concealed it? What could I gain by concealing it? Why, the thing is so absurd! But, tell me, what has suggested all this to you? Why do you think she is alive?"

Mrs. Warrener did not answer his questions; she believed them to be mere empty phrases. It was clear to her, from his refusal to deny his knowledge of Violet's existence, that all this wild story was true; and that her brother's sudden and strange interpretation of the message was something more than the morbid fancy of a sick man.

"And so you will not tell us where Violet is?" she said, firmly.

At this moment the door was opened by a servant, who did not know there was any body in the drawing-room, and the ladies from the dining-room trooped in. Certainly they looked sufficiently astonished to find Mr. Miller, obviously in great embarrassment, standing in earnest conversation with those two persons dressed in deep mourning; and, indeed, the two black figures formed a singular contrast to the blaze of costume worn by Mrs. Miller and her friends.

"Mother," said the young man, hastily, to a tall and stately woman, fair and good-looking, who wore heavy bracelets; "let me introduce you to Mrs. Warrener and her daughter: you have heard me speak of them."

Mrs. Miller bowed coldly: she thought it was an inopportune moment for a visit.

"And I will tell you why my daughter and myself are here at such an hour," said Mrs. Warrener, with courage, and she spoke rapidly and with great emotion. "Some months ago a young friend of ours—she was our greatest friend—was supposed to be drowned, when she was on a visit with us to the Highlands. She was not drowned. She ran away—why, I do not know; and we have mourned for her as if she were dead, for she was very dear to us. And now your son here, who knows where she is, who has allowed her relatives to grieve for her all this time, he will not say a single word to restore the girl to her friends. Are you surprised that—that I should intrude on you, when that is what I have come to ask him?"

Her voice trembled with indignation, and she made no effort to conceal her story from these strangers, who looked on in amazement.

"George, what is this?" said the tall, fair woman, remaining quite calm. "Is it about Miss North?"

His face was red with vexation, and there was an angry frown on his brows. He would have liked to have got hold of Violet at that moment to say, "Look here; this is a pretty thing you have let me in for!" But as it was, he had to answer something. It was an ugly indictment.

"I suppose it is about Miss North," said he, sulkily; "she caused me enough trouble when she was alive, and it seems I have not done with it yet. Perhaps Mrs. Warrener will tell you what reasons she has for believing all this extraordinary story; I can't make them out."

"If I were a man," said the pale, little woman, with increasing indignation, "I should be ashamed to make such pretenses. If you have had no pity on the girl's family or on her friends all this time, at least do something to repair the wrong by speaking now. Mr. Miller, where is Violet?"

She suddenly altered her tone to one of piteous entreaty. "I don't know where she is," he answered, angrily; "I don't care where she is—I don't want to know any thing about her—I wish to goodness she was at the bottom of the sea!"

"George," his mother said, severely, "this is strange language. Remember you are speaking to a lady. And you certainly seem to suggest that Miss North is *not* at the bottom of the sea, as her friends supposed she was. Do you know where she is?"

"I don't know anytning about it."

"Ask him, Mrs. Miller," said Mrs. Warrener, suddenly bursting into tears, "ask him if he can deny that our Violet is alive. Ask him if he has not seen her—if he does not know that she is alive?"

"George, answer at once!"

"What is the use of answering such questions? Doesn't everybody know the girl is dead?"

His mother regarded him narrowly, and said, slowly,

"You must answer me, then. Do you believe the girl to be dead?"

"It is none of my business," said he, impatiently; "if her friends think she is alive, let them find her. I have nothing to do with her. I tell you I don't know where she is."

"Oh, shame on you!" said Mrs. Warrener; "I did not believe a human being could be so cruel, so indifferent, so heartless. But I will appeal to the girl's father; it is he who must take the matter into his hands. Mrs. Miller, I beg your pardon, and your friends' pardon, for this intrusion. I am sorry to have caused you trouble. Come, Amy."

The little woman was crying. She merely bowed as she turned away, but Mrs. Miller took her hand and pressed it warmly, and accompanied her into the hall.

"All this is very strange, Mrs. Warrener," said she, in kindly accents, "and the conduct of my son, if he really knows about this girl being alive, is most inexcusable. Believe me, I will see what can be done to get the matter properly explained. Don't think the worst of him just yet; there may be some reason we don't know."

Many strange and conflicting emotions passed through Mrs. Warrener's heart as she and her daughter went home through the dusky night, and she scarcely knew whether to be glad or sad when she informed her brother of the result of her mission.

"Amy," she said, "you saw his face. Can you doubt that he knows?"

"Not in the least, mamma," was the prompt answer.

"And then, James, his absolute refusal to deny that he had seen her since we were in the Highlands. His mother pressed him to answer; it was no use. It is as clear to me as noonday that he knows where Violet is."

"That is not much matter," said the invalid, absently; "the great fact is that Violet still remains to us. We may see her yet, coming in by the door there, with the bashful, amused look she used to have. We will ask her no questions at all; she has a right to her own secrets."

"That is all very well, James," said his sister, with some touch of indignation in her voice; "but I can not help thinking of all we have suffered, and you especially, all on account of this foolish trick. What was the cause of your illness? I know very well. And her poor father, too. When I think of that young man, Miller, and of his having known this all along, and his hypocrisy in coming here—oh, I don't know what to think; I don't know which of the two is the worse."

"Sarah, you must say no word against Violet. You know nothing against her; you know nothing of the circumstances. It is enough that she is alive."

The small maid-servant brought in the Christmas dinner; it was not a gorgeous feast. The invalid had his plate placed on a chair by the side of his couch. When the banquet was over, he turned to his niece.

"Amy," said he, "fill up these three glasses. Sarah, we are going to drink health and happiness to our Violet—long life and health and happiness, and many more Christmas evenings, pleasanter than I suspect this one has been to her. I never thought we should be able to do that. Wherever she is, whatever may have been her reasons for leaving us, whether we ever see her again or not, no matter. Here is to her long life and happiness, and God bless her!"

Mrs. Warrener looked at the lean and trembling hand that held up the glass, and there was a doubtful "Amen!" in her heart.

CHAPTER XLI.

A BRINGER OF EVIL.

George Miller was to have spent the two days following Christmas with this family party which had been gathered together at Sydenham Hill; but after the visit of Mrs. Warrener and her daughter he saw fit to change his intention. For the rest of that evening even his own mother held aloof from him: again and again he vowed to himself that it was really too bad, but that this was what always came of one's getting one's self mixed up with the romantic sentimentalities of a woman.

Next morning he left the house, and went straight up to the lodgings which he understood that Violet North occupied. The more he thought of his wrongs, the more angry he became, until, when he knocked at the door, he was simply in a towering rage. He would have an end of all this mystery. He would have nothing more to do with this concealment. It was all very well for her to go off scot-free, leaving him under the imputation—against which he could bring no testimony whatever—of having inveigled the girl away from her friends and aided her in a shameful piece of deceit. No, he would have no more of this.

The landlady herself came to the door: as it happened, she was in a rage too, for she had just been quarreling with one of her domestics.

"Does Miss North—I mean Miss Main—live here?" asked the young man.

"No she don't."

He was staggered. He looked at the number over the door; he had made no mistake.

"She did live here," continued the landlady, regarding his bewilderment with a morose satisfaction. "She's goin' away o' Monday."

"On Monday!" said he. "And where is she now?"

"I don't know. Gone away for a 'oliday, I believe."

"But surely she will be back here before she goes to—New York?"

"I suppose she will," said the woman, with a gloomy indifference, "'cause her things are still in her room. She'll be back o' Monday."

"You don't know what hour she will call for her luggage?"

"No."

"Thank you. Good-morning."

She shut the door; and he was left standing there, in about as pleasant a predicament, according to his notions, as had ever entrapped a human being. Doubtless she had her passage taken. She would come up at some unexpected hour on Monday, whisk off her luggage in a four-wheeled cab, and be on her way to Liverpool, or Holyhead, or Southhampton, before any one was any the wiser. Nay, if he were to stand in Great Titchfield Street from early morning until she appeared, how could he prevent her going? He could not appeal to the police. It is true, he could scold her, and show her the rough usage he was experiencing all through her folly; but he could not compel her to release him from the promise she had exacted; while he looked forward to the pleasing prospect of a somewhat warm interview with Sir Acton North.

He walked away from Great Titchfield Street somewhat gloomily. Besides his sense of personal injury, he had an uncomfortable feeling that a cleverer person than himself—one like Mr. Drummond, for example, who was familiar with hair-splitting—could have hit upon some fair and good reason for pitching over this promise which would save his conscience. He himself, in his own way, tried to find out some such salve. What was a promise? Not any thing in itself; but only of use and value as long as it secured its object. Very well, then. What did Violet want? To get away from England to some place where no one would ever hear of her again, where she should be as one dead. Very well, again. She should have her wish. She should leave on Monday for New York. Her wishes would be respected. But after she was gone, and all she wanted secured, why should he continue to be the victim of a blunder? Why should not he confess the truth to Sir Acton North and Mr. Drummond, and clear himself? That could not affect Violet in any way. He would not tell them whither she had gone—only that she had left England without leaving behind her any information as to her future plans. Moreover, this would not be telling them that she was alive; for they seemed to know that already. And as they knew that, he had not the slightest doubt in the world that some blunder of hers had conveyed the information to them; and was he to bear the brunt of any more of her caprices?

Meanwhile Violet North, with a lighter heart than she had known for many a day, was seated in a railway-carriage and being swiftly carried down to Windsor. The forenoon was singularly bright and clear; the sunshine shone on the meadows that had been washed green by the recent heavy rains, on the brown plowed fields, where the flocks of rooks and starlings were busy, and on the dark lines of copse that were here and there almost black against the pale blue-and-white sky. It seemed to her that now at last she was escaping from the prison that had hemmed her in since her return from Scotland. All her preparations for her flight into the freedom of the Far West had been made. The bitter agony of parting was over. Soon she would stand on the deck of a noble vessel, and, looking back to the receding land of her birth, would know that her great sacrifice was now accomplished, and that she was leaving that dearest of all her friends with the prospect daily coming nearer him of a return to his old glad ways, and health, and cheerful spirits.

She already felt herself enfranchised. There was now an end to the weary days over the desk, to the lonely evenings in the small room, to the constant fear of discovery, and to the temptation to wander over to the south side of the river, with all the sore bitterness of heart that these visits occasioned. She had made her last pilgrimage in that direction the night before; and it had been a terrible one. All her life through she would never forget that night—the still, dark, Christmas-night; her ghost-like stealing up to the cottage in which her friends sat together; her unspoken, unheard, but agonizing farewell. No more of that. The brighter days were coming. Had she not said that in the future she would always think of those former companions of hers as cheerful and happy—wandering in the sweet air of Highlands—gay with the sports of hill-side and loch—enjoying the present, and forgetful of all the old bitterness of the past?

So she interested herself in the various out-of-door sights of this bright forenoon—the young wheat, the leafless orchards, the heavy wagons laboring along the muddy roads, and fields showing here and there patches of water, the result of the recent rains. She began to look out for signs of the great floods of which she had heard; and about Drayton those patches of water in the fields became more marked. Then she caught a glimpse, before getting to Slough, of the great, spectral bulk of Windsor's walls and turrets rising, pale and ethereal, into the blue and white overhead. On again; and now she caught sight of lines of white behind the distant trees, and hedges seemed to be growing in a lake. But what were these scattered objects to the richly colored and brilliant picture that lay before her as the train ran in towards Windsor? The great castle, with its lofty towers, was a mass of shadow, and so was the picturesque group of houses underneath it by the river; but here, close at hand, the brilliant sun shone on the red houses and the silvery-gray turrets of Eton, while all around was a vast sheet of smooth water reflecting the blues and whites of the sky. This immense lake was broken only by lines of pollard willows, and by some groups of trees in the distance that seemed to have still about them some touch of autumn yellow. Boys were paddling boats up the Eton lanes; still farther a-field a great punt was going the round of some workmen's cottages, which were completely surrounded by the water.

Both Mr. Dowse and his son were awaiting her at the station; they had driven over in a dog-cart. When Violet got up beside Mr. Dowse, senior, who was driving, he promised her a rare sight. Edward Dowse got up behind, and away they went.

They paused for a moment on Eton Bridge to look at the mighty volume of yellow-green water which, coming from the great lake that stretched all across the Brocas meadows, hurled itself against the massive stone piers, and then, rushing through between, spread itself out far and wide again, indicating only here and there, by a summer-house, or some such isolated object, the gardens and orchards it had submerged. They drove along the winding thoroughfare, catching here and there a glimpse of a boat at the end of a street. As they passed out into the country, they found the Playing-fields a sheet of olive-green water, the large elms only being visible. From Fifteen-arch Bridge the view was picturesque enough—the isolated lines of trees lighted up by the sun; the great plain of water with its dashes of blue; here and there a red-brick house surrounded by evergreens; and right in front of them a group of people waiting to be ferried across a part of the road which the floods had submerged.

"How shall we get across?" she asked.

They were standing still on the middle of the bridge, to have a look at the scene in front of them.

"Oh, all right," said Mr. Dowse, carelessly. "The water is not very deep."

Perhaps he was a little too careless; for on starting to go down the slope to this hollow where the water lay, the horse he was driving stumbled badly, and, on recovering, got an admonishing cut from his master. Whether this trifling accident had fluttered his nerves, or whether some sudden gleam of the water at his feet startled him, can only be guessed; but, at all events, the animal all at once became unmanageably restive. He reared and plunged, splashing the water about him, and causing the women who were standing by—waiting for the punt—to scream with alarm.

"Hold tight!" Mr. Dowse called out to Violet.

The warning was just given in time; for the next instant the horse made a sudden plunge to one side of the road, which nearly threw the dog-cart bodily into the deeper water by the side of the highway; and then it dashed madly forward. The driver had no sort of control over it; but fortunately the road in front was pretty straight. And so away they went at a furious pace, to the no small consternation of one or two people who were coming along the road; and so intent were Mr. Dowse and Violet in watching the excited animal that was now placing their lives in jeopardy that they had not the slightest notion that they alone were the occupants of the vehicle. When the horse swerved in the hollow, young Dowse had been pitched clean off the back-seat of the dog-cart, falling heavily on the wooden palings by the side of the road.

The way was clear before them; and in time the runaway horse showed symptoms of moderating his speed. He was finally stopped by a wagoner, who, happening to look back, and seeing what had occurred, had the presence of mind to draw his huge wagon right across the road, completely blocking all passage. There was no collision. The man got hold of the head of the animal, which now stood trembling and excited; and then it was that Mr. Dowse discovered that his son was missing.

"Good heavens!" he said, "where is Ted?"

They looked back; there were one or two people running toward them. When these came up, the news was brief, but terrible enough. The young gentleman had been pitched right on his head. He was lying insensible. They had sent in to Eton for a surgeon.

"Go back to him," said Violet, instantly, to her companion; "I will wait here with the dog-cart."

Mr. Dowse seemed stupefied. He did not think what he was doing in leaving this girl in charge of a frightened horse, even although the great wagon still blocked the way.

"Yes, yes," he said, "stay here for a minute—I must see —what has happened."

He set out to run. He met one or two country people; he asked them no questions. Then he came in sight of a group of persons standing by the roadside, not far from the spot where the horse had bolted.

The young man was in the middle of that group, his head supported on a friendly knee. He was apparently lifeless; not even a groan escaped him. There was no outward sign of injury, except a slight trace of blood about the lips.

"Stand back!" the father said, sternly, to the small and eager crowd. "Stand back, and give him air! You have sent for a surgeon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ted! Teddy!" the elder man cried, with some vague hope of arousing his son to consciousness. "Are you badly hurt, lad?"

There was no answer. He looked despairingly around.

"Is there a drop of brandy to be had—or whiskey?"

There was no answer to that, either. Fortunately, at this moment a brougham came along the road, the only occupant of which was an old lady who, although unknown personally to the Dowses, was a neighbor of theirs, and knew them by sight. When she discovered what had occurred, she instantly placed her carriage at Mr. Dowse's disposal. The apparently lifeless body was lifted in; the father followed; and the coachman was bid to drive gently on to The Laurels.

They came up to the point at which Violet had been left. She was now down in the road.

"What has happened?" she said, with a pale face, to Mr. Dowse; but the sight she saw inside the carriage was enough.

"Will you get some of the people to bring the dog-cart along?" said Mr. Dowse. It was not an occasion for ceremony.

They drove on again with that mournful burden; and she, having given the wagoner half a crown to leave his wagon for a few minutes and take the horse and dog-cart on to Mr. Dowse's house, walked slowly after. There were gloomy forebodings in her mind. That slowly driven carriage away along there seemed to be like a hearse. Why was it that, wherever she went, death, or the semblance of death, dogged her footsteps, and was forever plucking the sunshine out of the sky? Her coming seemed to be the signal for the coming of all misfortunes; birds of evil omen followed after her; she was as one doomed, association with whom was fatal.

Trembling and full of fear, she walked up to the house. She dreaded to hear the wail of a mother over her only son; she imagined the reproach with which that mother would raise her eyes from her son's pallid face and fix them on this stranger, who seemed the herald and the occasion of all evil things.

The poor mother had no such thoughts in her head: even if this were a time for affixing responsibility, she certainly would not have considered Violet to be the cause of this lamentable accident. But, all the same, the girl was oppressed by some strange feeling that it was dangerous for any one to be linked, in however slight a degree, with one whom evil fortune had marked out for its own; and so it was that she did not dare to go into that room where, as she knew, the young man lay, watched by his agonized parents. All the doors were open. She walked into the drawing-room, and sat down alone. Then she heard the doctor's carriage drive up to the front of the house.

CHAPTER XLII.

REPENTANCE.

On the morning after Christmas, Mrs. Warrener carried her great news up to Lady North; and that circumspect, prim little woman was a good deal more agitated than usual, and her cold, observant gray eyes were full of wonder.

"It is a strange story, Mrs. Warrener," she said, quickly. "Do you believe it yourself? Can you believe it? You know the fancies that get into the heads of persons who are ill; and you know your brother has been delirious."

"Yes, I know that," said Mrs. Warrener, "and my first impression last night was that he was wandering again; but no—not at all; and then, as I have told you, Mr. Miller confirms my belief. I am sure he knows all about her. I want Sir Acton to go him; his authority will get at the truth."

"My husband is in Belgium, Mrs. Warrener. Do you think, do you really think, I shall be justified in telegraphing to him to come home?"

"Most decidedly," said Violet's friend, without a moment's hesitation.

"You are so sure all this is true?"

"I am."

"He will think I have gone mad if I tell him why he is to come home."

"Then don't tell him. Merely say that he is urgently wanted."

"And in the mean while—"

"In the mean while, we ought to put an advertisement in the papers which may catch Violet's eye. And perhaps you might go to Mr. Miller and beg him to tell you where Violet is. He may be kinder to you than he was to me."

"But—but—" said Lady North, still a little bewildered, "what could be his object in concealing the fact? Is it possible he has been looking at us all this time wearing mourning for a girl whom he knew to be alive?"

"That part of it I can't make out at all," said Mrs. Warrener, rather wistfully. "But I am sure that Violet is in London."

The advertisement appeared in several of the newspapers on the Monday morning; probably few cared to pause and speculate over the story that lay behind such an ordinary notice as this: "*Violet N——,—We all know that you are alive and in London. Pray return. We will do every thing you can desire to secure your happiness.*" But George Miller knew the story; and as soon as he saw this advertisement, he promptly said to himself,

"Very well. They all know, without my telling them. I have not broken any promise; it is no fault of mine that they know. But, now they do know, am I to be made the victim of a pretense at concealment which is no concealment at all?"

That reasoning entirely satisfied him. Violet had had her wish, in so far as she was leaving the country without his having spoken a single word about her being alive to any person; and, so soon as she had really left, and disappeared without leaving any trace behind her, he considered he would be justified in clearing away the suspicions under which he had been most unjustly placed. By which route would she leave England? In any case, she would be clear off on Wednesday night. On Wednesday, therefore, he would show his friends how harshly they had dealt with him; and by that time Violet would be safe from pursuit, for neither he nor they would know when, or by which line, she had gone to America.

The cup of his troubles and mortification, however, was not yet full. On the Monday evening, just as he was going along to his club, Lady North and Anatolia drove up to his rooms in Half Moon Street, and stopped him on the pavement.

"You will excuse our calling on you at such a time, Mr. Miller; but we thought we should most likely catch you now," said Lady North.

He inwardly made use of language which, had they heard it, would have frightened his two visitors out of their wits. It was too bad, he thought. Here he was to undergo a repetition of the scene already enacted at Sydenham Hill; and as it was women, and always women, who came to put him under a raking fire of indignant reproaches, what answer could he make? He was not much of a heroic person; but he would twenty times rather have encountered the menaces of Violet's father.

"Will you walk up-stairs?" said he, with great courtesy, as he opened the door with his latch-key.

He lighted the candles on the table.

"Can I offer you some tea, Lady North? A couple of minutes—"

"No, thank you," said Lady North. She was a little frightened; and she concealed her fright under a demeanor of cold and proud reserve. She also seemed to add some inches to her stature as she continued, "Of course, you know why we have come."

"Well, yes, I suppose so," said he, sulkily. "Mrs. Warrener has been to you with that absurd story."

"Is it absurd?" Lady North said. "Mr. Miller, you surely can not mean to trifle with us in such a matter. Is it true?"

"I dont see why you should come to me at all," said he, becoming a little more vehement. "I have had enough of it. Mrs. Warrener comes over to our house, on a Christmas evening, when we have a family party gathered together, and straightway begins to accuse me, before all these people, of all manner of things; and of course, as she is a woman, I can't give her the answer I would give to a man. I think it is rather hard. And now, I suppose, you too, Lady North, mean to do the same thing. Well, I can't help it."

He affected an air of resignation. But Lady North was much cooler than Mrs. Warrener had been; and she was not to be put off by this specious show of injury.

"You know very well, Mr. Miller," said she, calmly, "that a single word of yours would relieve you at once from those very serious charges. I can not blame Mrs. Warrener. I must say I consider your conduct as very strange. It appears you can not deny your being aware that Violet is alive—"

"One minute, Lady North," said he, interrupting her, and speaking with some decision. "There is no use in our quarreling; and I can see you are going to say the same things that Mrs. Warrener said. That won't do any good. But I will tell you what I will do; if you like to wait till Wednesday evening—the day after to-morrow—I will tell you all I know about this affair. And I won't tell you before then."

"Really, Mr. Miller," said his visitor, "this is the most extraordinary conduct on your part—"

"Yes, I dare say it is," said he, his temper rising again. "But don't you think that before you find me guilty of cruelty, and caprice, and all the rest of it, you might wait to hear what

I have to say? And if you would ask Mrs. Warrener to be present on Wednesday evening, I should be obliged to you. I wish to say a word or two to her—"

"You will allow me to say I think Mrs. Warrener has acted most properly," observed Lady North, coldly.

"Yes, precisely," said he, with some bitterness. "That is because you are as ignorant of all the circumstances of the case as she is."

"I hope Sir Acton will be home by Wednesday evening," said Lady North, not a little anxious to turn the whole of this serious matter over to her husband.

"I hope so too," said Mr. Miller, promptly. "If I am to appear before a family gathering, and be impeached, and be put on my defense, I prefer that a man should be my judge."

"I am sure no one wishes to impeach you," said Lady North, rather regretfully, "if you would only tell us where Violet is."

He remained silent. He was not to be caught by his innocent invitation.

"Then we shall see you on Wednesday evening," she said, rising to go. "Will you come to dinner?"

"No, thank you," said he, for he still had the feeling that he had been badly treated. "A man going to be hanged does not have breakfast with the hangman. I am to be tried and convicted, you know."

"I am sorry if we have judged your conduct harshly," said Lady North, gently. "But you must admit we had some cause."

He would admit nothing of the kind. After his two visitors had left, he walked along to his club, and as he walked his mind was full of thoughts of vengeance, directed more particularly against Mrs. Warrener, whom he regarded as in most part responsible for all his trouble. Violet, of course, was the first cause. What business had she to thrust these conditions upon him; and then to go by some act of folly or other and let them know she was alone and in London? Then those other women, complaining, accusing, worrying him, as if he was a thief who had some silver spoons secreted about his person! He would have it out with them on the Wednesday evening. He would not suffer all this annoyance for nothing. And especially would he have a retort ready for Mrs. Warrener.

He had dinner by himself; and as he brooded over all the circumstances of this strange business, his mind, by some curious process, began to construct the form of that retort.

He was innocent: what if he threw back on his chief accuser the charge of being the origin of all this mischief? Mrs. Warrener had plainly intimated that he was the cause of Violet's having suddenly left the Highlands, and, in consequence, of her having inflicted so great an amount of pain upon her friends: what if he boldly retorted, at hap-hazard, that she herself, Mrs. Warrener, was the cause! Violet would not be there to contradict him, even if it chanced that what he said was inaccurate. But the more he thought of it, the more he considered it probable that Mrs. Warrener *was* the cause. He had seen in these later interviews with Violet every symptom of the girl's being devoted heart and soul to this man who had unwittingly become his rival. Of Mr. Drummond's great love and affection for Violet, the constant harping on the memory of her that ran through his delirious imaginings could leave no manner of doubt, if doubt had at any time been possible. What, then, could have caused the girl to take so desperate a step as that of pretending she had been drowned, in order to escape forever from her friends? Mr. Miller was, in his own estimation, not by any means a fool. He knew what mothers and sisters could become, when their son or their brother proposed to introduce a new member into the family. He knew the jealousy of women; he could imagine something of their malign ingenuity. And who could possibly be against this marriage between Mr. Drummond and Violet, unless it was Mrs. Warrener herself; and whose interests but hers could suffer?

"And so," argued this young man with himself, in great bitterness of heart, "having by some means or other made the girl miserable, having driven her from all her friends, and made an outcast and a wanderer of her, and having securely locked up the door, so that no one should come in to share with her Drummond's small income, she turns round on me, and makes me out to be the cause of all this mischief and misery, and brings accusations against me before my whole family, so that my own mother won't speak to me! By Jove, this must be set straight!"

When he went up to Euston Square on that Wednesday evening, he had the air of a man who was not to be trifled with. Moreover, he had conned over a few little bits of rhetoric, with which to rebut the astounding charges that had been brought against him. The trial of Warren Hastings was nothing to this.

Sir Acton North was there, grave and silent: he would say nothing against the young man until he had been heard.

Mrs. Warrener was there too, with a great anxiety in her pale and gentle face. Lady North was the third figure in the assembled court, none of her daughters being present.

"Although I am not represented by counsel," the young man was beginning to say with bitter sarcasm, when he was sternly interrupted by Sir Acton North.

"This is not a subject for joking, Mr. Miller," said he. "Tell me at once—is my daughter alive?"

"Yes," was the simple answer. Mrs. Warrener clasped her hands: there was not one there who loved Violet better than she did.

"Where is she?"

"I don't know."

An ominous frown came over Sir Acton North's forehead.

"Come, sir. You may have trifled with those ladies; you shall not trifle with me."

"I do not know where she is," George Miller continued, with a grand air of indifference; "but I will tell you where I believe her to be: I believe she is now on her way to America. And if you will listen, I will tell you all I know about her. You may believe the story or not; I can not help it if you don't. But at least I shall try to show to these ladies that their imagination got the better of them when they accused me of being a monster of deceit and cruelty, and perhaps they will acknowledge that they were a trifle precipitate. I knew nothing at all about—about Miss North—being alive, till a little over a month ago. There's a decorator-fellow in Regent Street, who got into my club on the strength of his being an artist—I believe he was an artist at the time—and he began talking to me one night about a mysterious sort of a girl who was in his father's place. He believed she knew some one in the Judæum. I asked her name: he said it was Miss Main; and the coincidence struck me, for I remembered that school-mistress. I asked more about her; some things seemed very odd; I thought I would go and see her. Well, I watched her coming out of the shop one evening, and I made sure it was Violet, though she was closely veiled. I watched her once or twice; then I spoke to her. It was Violet—I mean, Miss North. Very well. I was a little taken aback, of course, for I could not understand it; but she said she wanted every body to believe she was dead. She was going away from England, she said; and she insisted on my promising not to tell a human being that I had seen her—"

Here the young man colored somewhat.

"You may think I am breaking that promise; but, you see, I made it in the expectation that I could reason her out of all this; and then, in any case, what she wanted was to get safely away; and then, when you all seemed to know quite well, what was the use of my refusing to speak any longer?"

These somewhat incoherent reasons had not been prepared beforehand; there was no precision of language about them. Moreover, the young man said nothing of the further reason that he was determined to have no more personal annoyance over a matter which did not concern him.

"Well, I gave her my word of honor not to tell you. Perhaps that was wrong; but I was a little bit flustered, and I wanted to gain time. Then she said she had pretended to be drowned because she thought she was making her friends miserable, and after a time they would forget her. She was very anxious to leave England, I could see; but when she asked for news of all of you, and when I told her that Mr. Drummond was ill, then she would not go until she had news of his getting better. I had to go to her every few days with my report; she was very anxious. I don't know whether you believe all that I am telling you; I can not help it if you don't; but I am telling you all I know; and I think it is very hard that I should have been dragged into the matter at all, and then get nothing but angry suspicions for my pains."

"Well?" said Sir Acton. He was pacing up and down one end of the room, his hands behind his back. There was scarcely any trace of agitation on the deeply lined face.

"Well, that is all."

"But what made her leave the Highlands in such a way?" cried Lady North. "Why did she go and do such a thing?"

"You may well ask why!" said Mr. Miller, with some warmth. "You, I suppose, were quick to follow Mrs. Warrener in charging the whole thing upon me. I was the cause of it. I had induced the girl to come to London; I had concealed the fact of her being here; I had inflicted all this misery on her friends. Perhaps I might suggest another version. I have heard how even very amiable women can treat a girl who thinks of marrying their brother or their son. I know that Violet was too proud to bring dissension into any family—to go anywhere as an intruder. Yes, I will tell you my version of it. I will confess that I wanted to marry Violet too. I found I had no chance whatever; she cared more for Mr. Drummond than for every body else in the world; what *he* thought of *her* perhaps Mrs. Warrener can tell you. I believe they might have been married now, but for interference. When I first saw her, about a month ago, and when she talked of the misery she had been causing her friends, I fancied she had dreaded entering into this marriage, and had run away from it at all costs; but I discovered afterward that she thought of nothing else in the world than Mr. Drummond. Very well, then: what was the cause of her misery? *Who* was the cause of it? And who has been the cause of all this suffering?"

Lady North seized the young man by the arm.

"For pity's sake—!" she said.

He turned from Sir Acton, to whom he had been appealing; and there he saw Mrs. Warrener, her head buried in her hands, crying most bitterly. It was a cruel revenge to take for a few indignant words. But the pale little woman pulled herself together; and she spoke through her sobs.

"God forgive me if I have done wrong," she said, "through any mistake. But you do not know me, if you think my home was not as open to Violet as—as my heart was. I loved her always. I should have loved her ten times more if she had married my brother. Mr. Miller, if I have suspected you wrongly, I beg your pardon."

"Well," said he, with some compunction, "you *did* suspect me wrongly; for you see how I was dragged into this affair through no wish of my own. And I am sorry if I have hurt your feelings, Mrs. Warrener. You know better than any one else what the relations between you and Violet were. That is no business of mine."

This interruption had but little interest for Sir Acton North: he impatiently waited until these explanations had been made; and then he urged the young man to continue, and tell them what further steps Violet had taken.

"She sailed for America on Monday last," he said, simply.

"But for what part?"

"I dont know."

"You don't mean to say," said Sir Acton, stopping in that hurried pacing to and fro—"you don't mean to say that she has left this country altogether, without leaving the least trace behind her?"

"That was her intention."

"Oh, it is monstrous! it is inconceivable! What madness has possessed the girl! And you—you might have told us a week ago—"

"You forget," said the younger man, "that I had given her my word of honor not to tell you. It was not for me to interfere. I did my best to stop her; but when I saw she was determined to go to America—well, a girl knows her own business best."

"What is the name of those people in Regent Street?" demanded Sir Acton, abruptly.

"Dowse & Son."

"Do you know where they live?"

"In the country somewhere. They don't live in London, though young Dowse gives himself a holiday up here occasionally. If you want to make inquiries of them, you must wait till to-morrow."

All this time Mrs. Warrener had been sitting silent, her head bent down, the expression of her face betraying no consciousness of what was going on around her. Indeed, her thoughts were elsewhere—away back in the past, which she was now trying to read by a new and terrible light. If George Miller had resolved to have his revenge, he had now succeeded; a horrible fear darkened this poor woman's heart, and she scarcely dared to confess to herself all the possibilities to which his random accusation pointed. That accusation, it is true, was in one sense wrong—even preposterous. That she should have interfered between Violet and her brother through jealousy, or from a wish to protect his small income, was a notion that might occur to a business-like young man like Mr. Miller; not to her. But if the rest of it were true? If she had in reality poisoned these two minds by her innocent misrepresentations—what then? Had she ruined the lives of the two people whom she held, next to her own daughter, most dear in the world?

She rose, pale and *distraite*, to bid them good-bye. She was sure Sir Acton would find Violet. He would let her know, as his inquiries proceeded. Mr. Miller would forgive her if she had unintentionally wronged him.

When she reached home, she did not stay to take off her bonnet and things; she went straight to her brother's room. But she paused at the door, physically unable to go farther. Strange tremblings passed through her frame; she caught at the handle of the door to steady herself; a giddiness came over her eyes. She tried to form some notion of what she would say to him, and she could not. The one great yearning of her soul was to crave his forgiveness for the irreparable wrong she had done.

She managed to open the door: he was lying on the couch, apparently asleep. She gently shut the door behind her, and stole over to the couch and knelt down. She looked at the pale, emaciated hand that lay helpless there; that was her doing.

He had been half awake. He turned round and regarded her with some surprise. She could not speak.

"What is the matter, Sarah?" said he.

She only took the thin, white hand, and kissed it passionately, and burst into tears. Then he tried to raise himself a bit, and a strange, solemn look came into the wasted face.

"It was all a dream, then," he said, with resignation. "We shall never see her again."

"Oh, James, James!" his sister cried, with passionate grief; "it will break my heart to tell you! Violet is alive—it was indeed she who brought you the flowers. She has never ceased to love you—and—and perhaps you will see her again; but—how can I look on her face! And you—how can you ever forgive me—if—if all this is true?—and it looks so terribly true!"

His eyes were troubled and bewildered by her wild speech; but he sunk back on the couch with a sigh of relief.

"Violet is alive, then," he said. That was enough.

"But listen, James," she continued, in a quick, eager way, sometimes interrupted by a sob; "and then you will forgive me if you can. I made a terrible mistake; I must have misled you both; I thought she cared all along for Mr. Miller, and that they had only a lovers' quarrel; and now I am sure I was altogether and terribly wrong, for here she has been in London all this time, and Mr. Miller himself confesses that she has loved you all through with her whole heart, and has never cared for him at all. And now I see it so clearly—I begged you not to speak to her, to give her a chance, for I knew she was proud and would keep to her word at all hazards; and she would so readily misconstrue your silence, and your looking pained and anxious."

"Sarah," said her brother, raising himself on the couch, and regarding her, "all this is very wild talking. You accuse yourself needlessly. You appear to think that all the relations between Violet and me were managed by you; and that through some mistake you managed wrongly. It was not so. In such a matter I could not have trusted the opinion or report of any one, although, of course, you were Violet's intimate friend, and you knew more about the ways and natural wishes of a girl than I did. Don't blame yourself needlessly. When that compact between her and me was broken—it was only the awakening from a dream, the vanishing of a rainbow; we did it of our own free-will, and after all the explanation that was necessary. I saw her looking miserable, and I could not bear that. You spoke of a lover's quarrel; of her agitation over that letter from young Miller—well, what could be more likely?"

"But I was wrong—I am sure I was terribly wrong," his sister cried.

"What matter?" he continued, calmly. "I did not go by your judgment only; I went to herself. I asked her if she was harassed or troubled by our engagement, and that she should be free if she wished. And then I remember the bright and grateful look with which she confessed it was all a mistake—she held out her hand to me—it was the first time for days I had seen her look happy. That was enough."

"And yet," said Mrs. Warrener, sadly and thoughtfully, and almost as if she were speaking to herself, "and yet if that gladness were caused by something else?—if she believed, or had been taught to believe, that you had only a friendly affection for her?—if she thought she was relieving you from an obligation that was becoming daily more painful—"

She rose, as if she would throw off the burden of this thinking; her face looked haggard and tired.

"Oh, Violet!" she said, "why did you go away—without a word?"

"Where has she gone?" Mr. Drummond asked. You would have thought he was speaking of Amy, who had gone to spend the evening with a neighbor of theirs.

"To America. She fancies no one knows she is alive—no one but Mr. Miller, who discovered her accidentally about a month ago—and she made him promise to keep her secret. Imagine the poor girl going away out to that strange country all by herself, without a friend in the world, and all because she fancied she was somehow making you miserable, and that nothing would cure that but your believing she was dead. There is a great deal that is strange and unintelligible in all this; but to my dying day I will believe that I have had more to do with it than I can dare to think of. If only I could see Violet—for five minutes—if I could ask her one simple question—but I know the answer already. That girl has loved you as few girls have ever loved a man; that I am sure of, now when it is too late. And if I were to see her, what could I do now but go down on my knees before her and beg for her forgiveness? She would give it to me, I know. There never was any thing she could deny her friends. But now if she is lost to us forever—if we are to go on from year to year thinking of her as a stranger and a wanderer in some distant part of the world—I think that will be worse even than when we thought she was dead."

"I will find her," said Mr. Drummond, absently.

She looked at the wasted frame and the helpless arms, and her eyes grew moist again.

"I will find her when I get well," he continued, speaking slowly and at intervals. "I have never had anything to do in my life; this will be something. I shall have done a good work when I recover Violet, and take her back to her friends and her home. It is a strange thing to think I shall see her again. Many a time, in walking in the streets or along a road, I have seen in the distance the figure of a tall girl; and I have wondered what I should say and do if this were really Violet coming along, brought back to us out of the grave. I thought of that many a time. And now I shall go on my pilgrimage with the certainty of really seeing her some day—of taking her hand and hearing her speak—not as a mere ghostly picture in a dream, but in the real, bright, madcap Violet of old, who troubled us sorely, and whom we loved. And we shall scold her, too, for these wild pranks; and shall we not be proud of her when we bring her back—like a king's daughter—in clothing of wrought gold—with gladness and rejoicing? But there will be no wedding in any king's palace or elsewhere for her—enough of mischief came out of thinking of that in the old time. We shall bring her back only to the fireside, and to the old, quiet ways, and to our hearts. It is nothing to cry about, Sarah; it is a thing to get well and strong for. We want courage, hope, and strength. But my hands don't look very strong, do they?"

He held them out, and smiled. She could not see them for her tears.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AT LAST!

It is a pale, clear morning down here in Berkshire. A faint blue mist hangs about the black and distant woods; but closer at hand, in the garden of The Laurels, the sunshine is bright enough on the wintry-looking evergreens, on the ruddy berries left on the hawthorn-trees, and on the gleaming scarlet bunches on the hollies. There is something odd about the appearance of the front of the house: is it that the blinds of all the windows are drawn down? There is no sign of life about the place; and an intense stillness broods over both house and garden.

But by-and-by the figure is seen of a young girl who comes slowly along one of the paths. She is wandering idly about these empty grounds, by herself. And apparently her thoughts are none of the brightest, for there is a sad look in her eyes, and her cheeks have not the healthful brilliancy of a young girl's complexion. And what is she saying to herself?

"They ought not to ask me to stay: I shall become a curse to them, as to every one with whom I have been associated. I have never meant any harm to any one in all my life; but misfortune goes hand-in-hand with me, and misery is the only gift I have to offer to my friends. It is better I should be away among strangers. That poor young man—the few seconds in which he was sensible—why did he beg me to stay with his mother? I can not comfort her: I shall only bring further ill to her and to her house."

A servant comes out, and says a word to her; she turns and goes in-doors. She ascends the stairs noiselessly; and as she goes by one room in the corridor she seems to listen; but what is the use of listening when only the awful silence of death is within? She passes onward to a farther room, and here she finds a middle-aged woman, with silvery white hair, sitting mournfully and helplessly, before the fire.

"My child, have you considered? Come here," the woman says in a trembling voice.

The girl goes over to her, and puts her hand in the outstretched hand.

"Yes, I have thought about it," is the reply, uttered in a low voice. "You have been very kind to me—I would do any thing for you—but I can not stay in England."

"You will not take pity on the empty house?" says the mother, beginning to cry gently. "It was his last wish. You would be a daughter to us."

"I can not—I can not," says the girl, almost wildly. "You don't know how—how I bring misfortune to my friends. I want to be away—away from England—among strangers. I shall do no more mischief then to those I love. And as for you, Mrs. Dowse, you know I can not ever be to you what you have lost; and I should only remind you constantly of your great trouble."

"Am I likely to forget that ever?" she says.

"But in the mean time I will stay with you for a week or two. Then you must leave this house, and go away for a time: Mr. Dowse has already spoken to me about that. Will you come out into the garden now? The fresh air will do you good."

She only shakes her head. She has some writings in her lap, over which she has been poring, and crying. These are some of poor Teddie's poetical flights; and his mother finds in them the expression of the most tender and beautiful spirit that ever breathed upon the earth.

She went noiselessly down the stair again, intending to go out into the garden; but as she passed along the hall she found the open door-way suddenly darkened by the tall figure of a man. She looked up with a vague alarm; then she uttered a slight cry, and would have retreated. But the next moment the old instinct prevailed: she went quickly forward, her face upturned, and she found his arms close round her.

"Violet, my girl!" said this tall man, struggling to retain his composure, though his voice was shaken. "You have come back to us, after all! What has been the meaning of all this?"

Her heart was beating so wildly that she could not answer. There was a strange joy overflooding her soul. All the gloomy fancies—the desperate desire to forsake her friends and become a wanderer—seemed to have disappeared the moment she met her father's eyes and found his arms inclosing her. The world had come back to her, when she had been persuading herself she was scarcely of it. There was not a thought now of her being a misery-bringer.

"Come," said he, "let me see you. Let me see what you are like, after all this terrible business."

He disengaged her from him, and held her at a short distance: the light, entering under the narrow veranda, fell full upon her face, and showed how sadly worn and pale it was.

"You have not been happy, Violet. Why did you go away? Why did you want to leave us?"

Then he suddenly recollected himself. He had independently arrived at the same decision as Mr. Drummond. If this wayward girl were ever brought back to them, they should ask her no questions. She should return on her own terms: it was enough that they were to get her back at all.

"No, Violet," said he, "I won't ask you any questions."

"Let us go outside," she said, in a low voice. "Do you know he is dead?"

"Yes. The foreman at the works told me this morning."

They passed out into the garden: she had, as of old, taken his arm, but her hand trembled much, and she was not so firm and upright in her walk as usual.

"Papa, do they all know?" she asked, her face bent on the ground.

"Yes, certainly, Violet; how could you—but no, no! What you did was doubtless quite right. You had your reasons. You were quite right."

He stammered, and looked embarrassed. He was so glad to see his daughter again that he would forgive every thing, and ask no questions, as he had promised. Nevertheless, the inexplicable character of her conduct haunted him, and continually provoked him into "whys" and "hows."

"They all know? Mrs. Warrener, too?" she said.

"Yes, certainly."

"And I have made them suffer, and you a great deal; and now it has all come to nothing," she said, sadly. "There is no use in my going away now."

"In your going away!" he cried, in dismay. "Of course you are not going away, Violet. Now we have caught you, we sha'n't let you slip from us again. You are going back with us, Violet. And what a chance it was! We were told you had left on Monday."

"I was to have done so," she answered, simply, "but Mr. Dowse persuaded me to stay. His wife was in such a terrible way when Mr. Edward died, we thought she wouldn't get over it."

Sir Acton began to feel a great pity for these people, whom he had never seen. He was not a very sympathetic man, and, in any case, he would have had little in common with Mr. Edward Dowse; but he could see very plainly that, but for the death of that young man, he, Sir Acton, would almost certainly have never seen his daughter again in this world; and now his gratitude took the form of compassion for the survivors.

"Yes, I am very sorry for these poor people," said he, "very sorry. You must do what you can for them, Violet. But, in the first place, you know you must come at once and pay us a short visit—even if you run back here afterward—just to show the girls you are alive, and then they will feel safe in putting off their mourning."

"Oh no, no, papa!" she cried, shrinking back so that she even withdrew her hand from his arm; "I can never go back like that. I have done too much harm. I should be ashamed to meet any one I used to know!"

"They will forget all that!" said he, vehemently; "they will be delighted to see you, Violet. But what *did* you mean by running away in that fashion, without telling us first what was the matter, eh? Why didn't you come to me? Well, never mind that; I sha'n't ask any questions. But—but if you have any explanations or questions—"

He had never departed from this old conviction that women had a secret code of feelings, and sentiments, and opinions among themselves, which no man could hope to understand. He knew there was a mystery about this affair which it was no use his trying to solve.

"Violet," said he, with some embarrassment, "when the foreman told this morning you were still down here, I—I thought you might perhaps like to see one of your old friends. I telegraphed to Mrs. Warrener—"

The girl began to look alarmed.

"—In fact, she came down with me. Would you like to see her?"

"No," the girl was beginning to say, when he interrupted her.

"In fact, Violet, she is here. She is down in the road. She is most anxious to see you; for it appears she had something to do with your going away, and she wishes to make explanations to you; she seems very sorry."

"Very well," said the girl, nerving herself, "I will see her. Shall we walk down to the gate, papa?"

But this did not suit his purpose at all. He wanted to leave the two women together. Of course they had their secrets, their sentiments, their occult reasons; how could he aid in this esoteric interview? So he bid Violet wait in the garden, where there were paths among the laurels and other evergreens fitted for quiet talking, while he went down to the road to fetch the anxious and trembling-hearted little woman, who was walking to and fro there.

When Mrs. Warrener came up into this garden, she came alone, and for a time she did not see Violet. But suddenly the girl appeared, and went forward to her, calmly, and sadly, with her eyes cast down. Was this the bright and daring Violet of old? A throb of pain went through the heart of her visitor.

"Violet," said Mrs. Warrener, timidly, and she was trembling not a little, "I am not surprised that you did not wish to see me. I have done you a great injury."

But this strange reserve between these two could not continue. Were they both eager for forgiveness, that they stood apart, each waiting for the other's approach to the old kindness? The next minute Mrs. Warrener had caught the girl in her arms, and had hidden her face in her bosom, while she was sobbing out there, in passionate accents, the long story of her terrible mistake and all its consequences, with her present professions of penitence, and prayers for forgiveness. Much of all this startled Violet, and even frightened her. Was it true, then, that when they first heard of her being in London, they imagined she had run away to rejoin George Miller? No; she knew one at least who had not believed that of her.

"And when you see him, Violet," her friend was saying, in rather a wild way, "when you come to see him, and see what a wreck has been made, will you be able to forgive me then? That is all my doing, too. He was a changed man from the moment we believed you were drowned; he thought of nothing else but that: it was those long midnight walks in the rain and cold that brought on the fever."

"He has suffered all that for me!" the girl murmured, almost to herself. She had no thought of what she, also, had borne.

"But now—but now, Violet," said her friend, looking up to her face with tender and beseeching eyes, "it will be all different now, and there will be no more danger of these terrible misunderstandings. I will tell him why you looked glad when you broke off the engagement; I will tell him why you went away from us; he will understand how well one woman has loved him, if another has nearly wrecked his life. Oh, Violet, I could have believed any thing of your unselfishness but this. Well, a man ought to be content with life who has been shown such devotion."

"If you don't mind, Mrs. Warrener," said the girl, calmly, "I think perhaps I had better make these explanations myself. I will write to him."

The other remained silent, the tears running down her face. She felt the rebuke, although Violet had meant no rebuke. All that the girl had intended to convey was that henceforth it might be better if she spoke direct to this man, and alone, about such matters as concerned their two selves.

"Then you will write to him soon?" said Mrs. Warrener, piteously, "and you will come and see us soon, Violet! I am so anxious to have all this misery undone and atoned for, as far as that is possible now: you will come and help us to make it up to him. As for yourself, I can only hope you will forgive me in time. And, if it is not too late, Violet, I shall see you both get back to your old selves, and we may go to the Highlands again this year."

The girl shuddered.

"No, no," she said, "that would be too terrible!"

"Then, to the South?" said her friend, with some desperate effort at cheerfulness. "Perhaps the South would be better for him. And then, as soon as he is quite well, you shall have no more of my intrusion. Mr. Miller said something the other day about sisters and mothers, and their jealousy. I have enjoyed my brother's society for a great many years; it is time I gave up my place to another."

"But not to me, then," said the girl, quickly, and yet with something of sadness in her tone. "It is no use our talking of any thing like that. When your brother gets well, and goes away, it is you who must go with him."

"But you are coming to see him, Violet?" the pale little woman cried, in dismay. "You are coming to live with us again? You will give us the chance of trying to atone for what is past?"

"Yes, I will come and see him," said Violet, calmly, "in a day or two. Then I must return here. Afterward—well, that has to be settled yet."

Mrs. Warrener could not understand why Violet spoke thus. Was it not a simple matter, to restore the old state of things so soon as Mr. Drummond got well? The girl spoke as if she were about to fulfill some doom of perpetual banishment from all she had ever known and loved.

So it was arranged before Sir Acton and Mrs. Warrener left, and after a brief word with Mr. Dowse, who was in-doors, that Violet should go up to her father's house on the following Saturday, and go over to visit her friends in the South in the evening. In the mean time, she promised Mrs. Warrener she would write a letter to Mr. Drummond.

It was a long letter, of which no word shall be spoken here. To the invalid, lying there on his couch, haunted by dreams of the past and all that might have been, it was a sacred revelation which no eye but his ever read. It was the story, told in tender phrases enough, but loyally honest and outspoken as the soul of her who penned it, of the simple, sincere, and enduring love that filled a woman's heart; of a love that was likely to remain there until the pulses of the heart itself were stilled by the gentle hand of death.

And then that night. She was to be over at eight o'clock; but he had a secret fancy she might come before the time; and as he sat up on the couch, his back propped by a cushion, he pretended to be talking cheerfully to his sister and niece; but he was in reality listening for the sound of wheels outside. Many a time he had listened in like manner, even when he knew that his fancies were all in vain; and many a time, though he mourned for her as dead, he had imagined the door to open, and he had seen a vision of the fair young girl entering with her shy smile, her tender eyes, her gracious presence. Was it now a real flesh-and-blood Violet that was coming? no phantom from the shadowy halls of Death, but Violet herself, the frank, generous, courageous girl who had won the hearts of all the sailors on board the *Sea-Pyot?*

"I wish," said he, seriously, to his sister, "I wish there were none of that confounded green in this dressing-gown. She always hated green in any costume."

"She won't think about your costume, I imagine," his sister said. "Perhaps you would like a white tie, since a young lady is coming to sup with you?"

"A white tie? No," he said, absently (he was really counting the minutes as they passed, and listening intently), "I do not know what impressions are produced by a white tie; but they are real and mysterious. If you meet a waiter in the street, you can not tell who he is; but his face haunts you. You know there is something wanting to complete the portrait—you could identify him if that were present. A butler out of livery in the street is a very strange-looking person—the dignity of his manner is irreconcilable with a billycock hat."

He looked again at his watch, hanging upon the wall. It was a trifle past the half-hour.

"How long is it since Violet was over here?" he asked.

"About six months now," said Mrs. Warrener.

"A great deal has happened in that half-year. It seems longer than half a year—there is so much distance in it, the sense of distance you get from death. Violet has been quite close by all this time; and yet she seems to be coming back to us from a far country—farther away than any on the other side of the sea—and one could almost imagine she will look strange and unfamiliar—"

He stopped, for they could hear outside the sound of wheels approaching. Presently that sound ceased. Amy Warrener jumped up and flew out of the room; her mother followed her. James Drummond was left alone.

And now he looked at the door; for he knew who would open it next. He was weak and ill; perhaps that was why the wasted frame trembled so. Then the door was gently opened; and Violet, tall, pale, her eyes streaming with tears, appeared. For an instant she stood motionless, trying to collect herself before approaching the invalid; but the first glimpse she got of the shattered wreck lying before her caused her to utter a quick, sharp cry of agony, and she threw herself on her knees beside him, and wound her arms round him for the first time, as she cried, in the bitterness of her heart,

"My darling, my darling! it is not too late?"

"No, not too late," he answered, solemnly; "whether it be in this world, or in the greater world that lies ahead. Violet, give me your hand."

She raised herself for a moment, and their eyes were fixed on each other—his clear, and calm, and earnest; hers troubled, and dark, and full of an agonized tenderness. He held out his right hand to her, and she placed her right hand in his; and there was no need of any further words between these two, then or thereafter, during the time that was left to them to be together.

CHAPTER XLIV.

JOY AND FEAR

Was this man mad, that he, an invalid, propped up in his chair, and scarcely able to move a wine-glass out of his way, should play pranks with the whole created order of things, tossing about solar systems as if they were no more than juggler's balls, and making universal systems of philosophy jump through hoops as if he were a lion-tamer in a den? These poor women did not know where to catch him. Violet used to say that he was like a prism, taking the ordinary daylight of life and slitting it up into a thousand gay and glancing colors. That was all very well as a spectacular exhibition; but how when he was apparently instructing them in some serious matter? Was it fair so these tender creatures who had so lovingly nursed him, that he should assume the airs of a teacher, and gravely lead out his trusting disciples into the desert places of the earth, when his only object was to get them into a bog and then suddenly reveal himself as a will-o'-the-wisp, laughing at them with a fiendish joy?

What, for example, was all this nonsense about the land question—about the impossibility of settling it in England so long as the superstitious regard for land existed in the English mind? They were quite ready to believe him. They deprecated that superstition most sincerely. They could not understand why a moneyed Englishman's first impulse was to go and buy land; they could give no reason for the delusion existing in the bosom of every Englishman that he, if no one else, could make money out of the occupation of a farm that had ruined a dozen men in succession. All this was very well; but what were they to make of his suddenly turning round and defending that superstition as the most beautiful sentiment in human nature? It was, according to him, the sublimest manifestation of filial love—the instinct of affection for the great mother of us all. And then the flowers became our small sisters and brothers; and the dumb look of appeal in a horse's eye, and the singing of the thrush at the break of day, these were but portions of the inarticulate language now no longer known to us. What was any human being to make of this rambling nonsense?

It all came of the dress-coat, and of his childish vanity in his white wristbands. It was the first occasion on which he had ceremoniously dressed for dinner; and Violet had come over; and he was as proud of his high and stiff collar and of his white necktie as if they had been the ribbon and star of a royal order. And then they were all going off the next morning—Miss North included—to a strange little place on the southern side of the Isle of Wight; and he had gone "clean daft" with the delight of expectation. There was nothing sacred from his mischievous fancy. He would have made fun of a bishop. In fact he did; for, happening to talk of inarticulate language, he described having seen, "the other day," in Buckingham Palace Road, a bishop who was looking at some china in a shop-window; and he went on to declare how a young person driving a perambulator, and too earnestly occupied with a sentry on the other side of the road, incontinently drove that perambulator right on to the carefully swathed toes of the bishop; and then he devoted himself to analyzing the awful language which he *saw* on the afflicted man's face.

"But, uncle," said Amy Warrener, with the delightful freshness of fifteen, "how could you see any body in Buckingham Palace Road the other day, when you haven't been out of the house for months?"

"How?" said he, not a whit abashed. "How could I see him? I don't know, but I tell you I did see him. With my eyes, of course."

He lost his temper, however, after all.

"To-morrow," he was saying, "I bid good-bye to my doctor. I bear him no malice: may he long be spared from having to meet in the next world the people he sent there before him! But look here, Violet—to-morrow evening we shall be FREE!—and we shall celebrate our freedom, and our first glimpse of a sea-shore, in Scotch whisky—in hot Scotch whisky—in Scotch whisky with the boilingest of boiling water, just caught at the proper point of cooling. You don't know that point; I will teach you: it is perfection. Don't you know that we have just caught the cooling point of the earth—just that point in its transition from being a molten mass to its becoming a chilled and played-out stone that admits of our living—"

"But, uncle," said Amy, "I thought the earth used to be far colder than it is now. Remember the glacial period," added this profound student of physics.

This was too much.

"Dear, dear me!" he exclaimed. "Am I to be brought up at every second by a pert school-girl when I am expounding the mysteries of life? What have your twopenny-halfpenny science-primers to do with the grand secret of toddy? I tell you we must CATCH IT AT THE COOLING POINT; and then, Violet—for you are a respectful and attentive student—if the evening is fine, and the air warm, and the windows open and looking out to the south—do you think the doctor could object to that one first, faint trial of a cigarette, just to make us think we are up again in the August nights—off Isle Ornsay—with Alec up at the bow singing that hideous and melancholy song of his, and the *Sea-Pyot* slowly creeping along by the black islands?"

She did not answer at all; but for a brief moment her lip trembled. Amidst all this merriment she had sat with a troubled face, and with a sore and heavy heart. She had seen in it but a pathetic bravado. He would drink Scotch whisky—he would once more light a cigarette—merely to assure her that he was getting thoroughly well again; his laughter, his jokes, his wild sallies were all meant, and she knew it, to give her strength of heart and cheerfulness. She sat and listened, with her eyes cast down. When she heard him talk lightly and playfully of all that he meant to do, her heart throbbed, and she dared not lift her eyes to his face, lest they should suddenly reveal to him that awful conflict within of wild and piteous and agonizing doubt.

Then that reference to their wanderings in the Northern seas—he did not know how she trembled as he spoke. She could never even think of that strange time she had spent up there, and of the terrible things that had come of it, without a shudder. If she could have cut it out of her life and memory altogether, that would have been well; but how could she forget the agony of that awful farewell—the sense of utter loneliness with which she saw the shores recede—the conviction then borne in upon her, and never wholly eradicated from her mind, that some mysterious doom had overtaken her, from which there was no escape. The influence of that time, and of the time that succeeded it, still dwelt upon her, and overshadowed her with its gloom. She had almost lost the instinct of hope. She never doubted, when they carried young Dowse into that silent room, but that he would die; was it not her province to bring misery to all who were associated with her? And she had got so reconciled to this notion that she did not argue the matter with herself; she had, for example, no sense of bitterness in contrasting this apparent "destiny" of hers with the most deeply rooted feeling in her heart—namely, a perfectly honest readiness to give up her own life if only that could secure the happiness of those she loved. She did not even feel injured because this was impossible. Things were so; and she accepted them.

But sometimes, in the darkness of her room, in the silence of the night-time, when her heart seemed to be literally breaking with its conflict of anxious love and returning despair, some wild notion of propitiation—doubtless derived from ancient legends—would flash across her mind; and she would cry in her agony, "If one must be taken, let it be me! The world cares for him: what am I?" If she could only go out into the open place of the city; and bare her bosom to the knife of the priest; and call on the people to see how she had saved the life of her beloved—surely that would be to die happy. What she had done, now that she came to look back over it, seemed but too poor an expression of her great love and admiration. What mattered it that a girl should give up her friends and her home? Her life—her very life—that was what she desired, when these wild fancies possessed her, to surrender freely, if only she could know that she was rescuing him from the awful portals that her despairing dread saw open before him, and was giving him back—as she bid him a last farewell—to health, and joy, and the comfort of many friends.

With other wrestlings in spirit, far more eager and real than these mere fancies derived from myths, it is not within the province of the present writer to deal; they are not for the house-tops or the market-places. But it may be said that in all directions the gloomy influences of that past time pursued her; wherever she went she was haunted by a morbid fear that all her resolute will could not shake off. Where, for example, could she go for sweeter consolation, for more cheering solace, than to the simple and re-assuring services of the church?—but before she entered, eager to hear words of hope and strengthening, there was the grave-yard to pass through, with the misery of generations recorded on its melancholy stones.

CHAPTER XLV.

"O GENTLE WIND THAT BLOWETH SOUTH!"

But if this girl, partly through her great and yearning love, and partly through the overshadowing of her past sufferings, was haunted by a mysterious dread, that was not the prevailing feeling within this small household which was now pulling itself together for a flight to the South. Even she caught something of the brisk and cheerful spirit awakened by all the bustle of departure; and when her father, who had come to London Bridge Station to see the whole of them off, noticed the business-like fashion in which she ordered every body about, so that the invalid should have his smallest comforts attended to, he could not help saying, with a laugh,

"Well, Violet, this is better than starting for America all by yourself, isn't it? But I don't think you would have been much put out by that, either."

A smart young man came up, and was for entering the carriage.

"I beg your pardon," said she, respectfully but firmly. "This carriage is reserved."

The young man looked at both windows.

"I don't see that it is," he retorted, coolly.

He took hold of the handle of the door, when she immediately rose and stood before him, an awful politeness and decorum on her face, but the fire of Brunehild, the warrior-maiden, in her eyes.

"You will please call the guard before coming in here. This carriage is reserved."

At this moment her father came forward, not a little inclined to laugh.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but the carriage is really reserved. There was a written paper put up; it has fallen down, I suppose. There it is."

So the smart young man went away; but was it fair, after this notable victory, that they should all begin to make fun of her fierce majestic bearing, and that the very person for whose sake she had confronted the enemy should begin to make ridiculous rhymes about her, such as these:

> "Then out spoke Violet Northimus,
> Of Euston Square was she—.
> 'Lo, I will stand at thy right hand,
> And guard the door with thee!'"

Violet Northimus did not reply. She wore the modesty of a victor. She was ready at any moment to meet six hundred such as he; and she was not to be put out, after the discomfiture of her enemy, by a joke.

Then they slowly rolled and grated out of the station; and by-and-by the swinging pace increased, and they were out in the clearer light and the fresher air, with a windy April sky showing flashes of blue from time to time. They went down through a succession of thoroughly English-looking landscapes—quiet valleys, with red-tiled cottages in them, bare heights green with the young corn, long stretches of brown and almost leafless woods, with the rough banks outside all starred with the pale, clear primrose. There was one in that carriage who had had no lack of flowers that spring—flowers brought by many a kindly hand to brighten the look of the sick-room; but surely it was something more wonderful to see the flowers themselves, growing here in this actual and outside world, which had been to him, for many a weary week, but a dimly imagined dream-land. There were primroses under the hedges; primroses along the high banks; primroses shining pale and clear within the leafless woods, among the russet leaves of the previous autumn. And then the life and motion of the sky: the south-westerly winds: the black and lowering clouds suddenly followed by a wild and dazzling gleam of sunlight; the grays and purples flying on, and leaving behind them a welcome expanse of shining April blue.

The day was certainly squally enough, and might turn to showers; but the gusts of wind that blew through the carriage were singularly sweet and mild; and again and again, Mr. Drummond, who had been raised by all this new life and light into the very highest spirits, declared with much solemnity that he could already detect the smell of the salt sea-air. They had their quarrels, of course. It pleased a certain young lady to treat the South coast of England with much supercilious contempt: you would have imagined, from her talk, that there was something criminal in one's living even within twenty miles of the bleak downs, the shabby precipices, and the muddy sea, which, according to her, were the only recognizable features of our southern shores. She would not admit, indeed, that there was any sea at all there; there was only churned chalk. Was it fair to say, even under the exasperation of continual goading, that the Isle of Wight was only a trumpery toy-shop; that its "scenery" was fitly adorned with bazaars for the sale of sham jewelry; that its amusements were on a par with those of Rosherville Gardens; that its rocks were made of mud and its sea of powdered lime?

"By heavens," exclaimed her antagonist, "I will stand this no longer! I will call upon Neptune to raise such a storm in the Solent as shall convince you that there is quite enough sea surrounding that pearl of islands, that paradise, that world's wonder we are going to visit—"

"Yes, I have no doubt," said she, with sweet sarcasm, "that if you stirred the Solent with a tea-spoon, you would frighten the yachtsmen there out of their wits—"

"Oh, Violet," cried another young lady, "you know you were dreadfully frightened that night in Tobermory Bay, when the equinoctial gales caught us, and the men were tramping overhead all night long."

"I should be more frightened down here," was the retort, "because, if we were driven ashore, I should be choked first and drowned afterward. Fancy going out of the world with a taste of chalk in your mouth!"

Well, at this moment the fierce discussion was stopped by the arrival of the train at Portsmouth; but here a very singular incident occurred. Violet was the first to step out on to the platform.

"You have a tramway-car that goes down to the pier, have you not?" she asked of the guard.

"Ain't going to day, miss," was the answer. "Boats can't come in to Southsea; the sea is very high. You'll have to go to Portsea, miss—"

Now what was this man's amazement on seeing this young lady suddenly burst out laughing, as she turned and looked into the carriage.

"Did you hear that?" she cried. "The Solent is raging! They can't come near Southsea! Don't you think, Mrs. Warrener, that it will be very dangerous to go to Portsea?"

"I'll tell you what it is," said Mrs. Warrener, with a malicious smile, "if a certain young lady I know were to be ill in crossing, she would be a good deal more civil to her native country when she reached the other side."

But in good truth, when they got down to Portsea there was a pretty stiff breeze blowing; and the walk out on the long pier was not a little trying to an invalid who had but lately recovered the use of his limbs. The small steamer, too, was tossing about considerably at her moorings; and Violet pretended to be greatly alarmed because she did not see half a dozen life-boats on board. Then the word was given, the cables thrown off, and presently the tiny steamer was running out to the windy and gray-green sea, the waves of which not unfrequently sent a shower of spray across her decks. The small party of voyagers crouched behind the funnel, and were well out of the water's way.

"Look there now!" cried Mr. Drummond, suddenly pointing to a large bird that was flying by, high up in the air, about a quarter of a mile off, "do you see that? Do you know what that is? That is a wild goose, a gray lag, that has been driven in by bad weather: *now* can you say we have no waves, and winds, and sea in the South?"

Miss Violet was not daunted.

"Perhaps it is a goose," she said, coolly. "I never saw but one flying—you remember you shot it. What farm-yard has this one left?"

"Oh, for shame, Violet," Mrs. Warrener called out, "to rake up old stories!"

She was punished for it. The insulted sportsman was casting about for the cruelest retort he could think of, when, as it happened, Miss Violet bethought her of looking round the corner of the boiler to see whether they were getting near Ryde; and at the same moment it also happened that a heavy wave, striking the bows of the steamer, sent a heap of water whirling down between the paddle-box and the funnel, which caught the young lady on the face with a crack like a whip. As to the shout of laughter which then greeted her, that small party of folks had heard nothing like it for many a day. There was salt-water dripping from her hair, salt-water in her eyes, salt-water running down her tingling and laughing cheeks; and she richly deserved to be asked, as she was immediately asked, whether the Solent was compounded of water and marl, or water and chalk, and which brand she preferred?

Was it the balmy southern air that tempered the vehemence of these wanderers as they made their way across the island, and, getting into a carriage at Ventnor, proceeded to drive along the Undercliff? There was a great quiet prevailing along these southern shores. They drove by underneath the tall and crumbling precipices, with wood-pigeons suddenly shooting out from the clefts, and jackdaws wheeling about far up in the blue. They passed by sheltered woods, bestarred with anemones and primroses, and showing here and there the purple of the, as yet, half opened hyacinth; they passed by lush meadows, all ablaze with the golden yellow of the celandine and the purple of the ground ivy; they passed by the broken, picturesque banks where the tender blue of the speedwell was visible from time to time, with the white glimmer of the starwort. And then all this time they had on their left a gleaming and wind-driven sea, full of motion, and light, and color, and showing the hurrying shadows of the flying clouds.

At last, far away, secluded and quiet, they came to a quaint little inn, placed high over the sea, and surrounded by sheltering woods and hedges. The sun lay warm on the smooth, green lawn in front, where the daisies grew. There were dark shadows—almost black shadows—along the encircling hedge and under the cedars; but these only showed the more brilliantly the silver lighting of the restless, whirling, wind-swept sea beyond. It was a picturesque little house, with its long veranda half smothered in ivy and rose-bushes now in bud; with its tangled garden about, green with young hawthorn and sweetened by the perfume of the lilacs; with its patches of uncut grass, where the yellow cowslips drooped. There was an air of dreamy repose about the place; even that whirling and silvery-gray sea produced no sound; here the winds were stilled, and the black shadows of the trees on that smooth, green lawn only moved with the imperceptible moving of the sun.

Violet went up-stairs and into her room alone; she threw open the small casements, and stood there, looking out with a somewhat vague and distant look. There was no mischief now in those dark and tender eyes; there was rather an anxious and wistful questioning. And her heart seemed to go out from her to implore these gentle winds, and the soft colors of the sea, and the dreamy stillness of the woods, that now they should, if ever that was possible to them, bring all their sweet and curative influences to bear on him who had come among them. Now, if ever! Surely the favorable skies would heed, and the secret healing of the woods would hear, and the bountiful life-giving sea-winds would bestir to her prayer!—surely it was not too late!

CHAPTER XLVI.

HOPE'S WINGS.

THE long journey had taxed his returning strength to the utmost, and for the remainder of that day he looked worn and fatigued; but on the next morning he was in the best of spirits, and nothing would do but that they should at once set out on their explorations.

"Why not rest here?" said Violet.

They were sitting in the shade of their morning room, the French windows wide open, the pillars and roof of the veranda outside framing in a picture of glowing sunlight and green vegetation, with glimpses of the silvery, white sea beyond.

"Why not rest here?" she said. "What is the use of driving about to see bare downs, and little holes in the mud that they call chasms, and water-falls that are turned on from the kitchen of the hotel above? That is what they consider scenery in the Isle of Wight; and then, before you can see it, you must buy a glass brooch or a china doll."

The fact is, he did not himself particularly care about these excursions, but he was afraid of the place becoming tiresome and monotonous to one whom he would insist on regarding as a visitor. She, on the other hand, affected a profound contempt for the sufficiently pleasant places about the Isle of Wight for the very purpose of inducing him to rest in the still seclusion of this retreat they had chosen. But here was the carriage at the door.

"Violet," said Amy Warrener, as they were leisurely driving along the quiet ways, under the crumbling gray cliffs, where the jackdaws were flying, "where shall we go for a climb? Don't you think we might come upon another Mount Glorioso?"

"No," said the girl, rather absently; "I don't think we shall see another Mount Glorioso soon again."

"Not this autumn?" cried Mr. Drummond, cheerfully; "not this summer?—for why should we wait for the autumn? Violet, I have the most serious projects with regard to the whole of us. It is high time that I set about recognizing the ends of existence; that is to say, before I die I must have a house in Bayswater and two thousand a year. All nice novels end that way. Now, in order that we shall all reach this earthly paradise, what is to done? I have two projects. A publisher—the first wise man of his race—I will write an epitaph for him quite different from my universal epitaph—this shrewd and crafty person, determined to rescue at least one mute, inglorious Milton from neglect, has written to me, There! He has read my article on "The Astronomical Theory with Regard to the Early Religions;" he has perceived the profound wisdom, the research, the illuminating genius of that work—by-the-way, I don't think I ever fully explained to you my notions on that subject?"

"Oh no, please don't!" said Violet, meekly. "What does the publisher say?"

"Do you see the mean, practical, commercial spirit of these women?" he said, apparently addressing himself; "it is only the money they think of. They don't want to be instructed!"

"I know the article well enough," said Violet, blushing hotly; "I read it—I—I saw it advertised, and bought the review, when I hadn't much money to spend on such things."

"Did you, Violet?" said he, forgetting for a moment his nonsense. Then he continued: "The publisher thinks that with some padding of a general and attractive nature, the subject might be made into a book. Why, therefore, should not our fortune be made at once, and the gates of Bayswater thrown open to the Peri? I do believe I could make an interesting book. I will throw in a lot of Irish anecdotes. I wonder if I could have it illustrated with pictures of 'Charles the First in Prison,' the 'Dying Infant,' 'The Sailor's Adieu,' and some such popular things!"

"I think," said Violet, humbly, "we might go on to the other project."

"Ah," said he, thoughtfully, "that requires time and silence first. I must have the inspiration of the mountains before I can resolve it. Do you know what it is?"

"Not yet."

"It is the utilizing of a great natural force. That is what all science is trying to do now; and here is one of the mightiest forces in nature of which nothing is made, unless it be that a few barges get floated up and down our rivers. Do you see? The great mass of tidal force, absolutely irresistible in its strength, punctual as the clock itself, always to be calculated on, why should this great natural engine remain unused?"

"But then, uncle," said a certain young lady, "if you made the tide drive machinery at one time of the day, you would have to turn the house round to let it drive it again as it was going back."

"Child, child!" said the inventor, peevishly, "why do you tack on these petty details to my grand conception? It is the idea I want to sell; other people can use it. Now, will the Government grant me a patent?"

"Certainly," said Violet.

"What royalty on all work executed by utilizing the tidal currents?"

"A million per cent."

"How much will that bring in?"

"Three millions a minute."

"Ah," said he, sinking back with a sigh, "we have then reached the goal at last. Bayswater, we approach you. Shall the brougham be bottle-green or coffee-colored?"

"A brougham!" cried Violet; "no—a barge of white and gold, with crimson-satin sails, and oars of bronze, towed by a company of snow-white swans—"

"Or mergansers—"

"And floating through the canals of claret which we shall set flowing in the streets. Then the Lord-mayor and the Corporation will come to meet you, and you will get the freedom of the City presented in a gold snuff-box. As for Buckingham palace—well, a baronetcy would be a nice thing."

"A baronetcy! Three millions a year and only a baronet! By the monuments of Westminster Abbey, I will become a duke and an archbishop rolled into one, and have the right of sending fifteen people a day to be beheaded at the Tower!"

"Oh, not that, uncle!"

"And why not?"

"Because there wouldn't be any publishers at the end of the year."

"And here we are at Black Gang Chine!"

Violet would not go down. She positively refused to go down. She called the place Black Gang Sham, and hoped they were pouring enough water down the kitchen-pipe of the hotel to make a foaming cataract. But she begged Mrs. Warrener and Amy, who had not seen the place, to go down, while she remained in the carriage with Mr. Drummond. So these two disappeared into the bazaar.

"You are not really going to Scotland, are you?" she said, simply, her head cast down.

"I have been thinking of it," he answered; "why not?"

"The air here is very sweet and soft," she said, in a hesitating way; "of course, I know the climate on the west coast of Scotland is very mild, and you would get the mountain air as well as the sea air; but don't you think the storms, the gales that blow in the spring—"

"Oh," said he, cheerfully, "I shall never be pulled together till I get up to the North—I know that. I may have to remain here till I get stronger, but by-and-by I hope we shall all go up to Scotland together, and that long before the shooting begins.

"I—I am afraid," she said, "that I shall not be of the party."

"You? Not you?" he cried; "you are not going to leave us, Violet, just after we have found you?"

He took her hand, but she still averted her eyes.

"I half promised," she said, "to spend some time with Mr. and Mrs. Dowse. They are very lonely. They think they have a claim on me, and they have been very kind."

"You are not going to Mr. and Mrs. Dowse, Violet," said he, promptly. "I pity the poor people, but we have a prior claim on you, and we mean to insist on it. What! just after all this grief of separation, you would go away from us again? No, no! I tell you, Violet, we shall never find you your real self until you have been braced up by the sea-breezes. I mean the real sea-breezes. You want a scamper among the heather, I can see that; for I have been watching you of late, and you are not up to the right mark. The sooner we all go the better. Do you understand that?"

He had been talking lightly and cheerfully, not caring who overheard. She, on the other hand, was anxious and embarrassed, not daring to utter what was on her mind. At last she said,

"Will you get down for a minute or two, and walk along the road? It is very sheltered here, and the sun is warm."

He did so, and she took his arm, and they walked away apart in the sunlight and silence. When they had gone some distance, she stopped and said, in a low and earnest voice,

"Don't you know why I can not go to the Highlands with you? It would kill me. How could I go back to all those places?"

"I understand that well enough, Violet," said he, gently; "but don't you think you ought to go for the very purpose of conquering that feeling? There is nothing in that part of the country to inspire you with dread. You would see it all again in its accustomed light."

She shook her head.

"Very well, then," said he, for he was determined not to let these gloomy impressions of the girl overcome him; "if not there, somewhere else. We are not tied to Castle Bandbox. There is plenty of space about the West Highlands, or about the Central Highlands, for the matter of that. Shall we try to get some lodging in an inn or farm-house about the Moor of Rannoch? Or will you try the islands—Jura, or Islay, or Mull?"

She did not answer; she seemed to be in a dream.

"Shall I tell you, Violet, he continued, gravely and gently, "why I want you to come with us? I am anxious that you and I should be together as long—as long as that is possible. One never knows what may happen, and lately—well, we need not speak of it, but I don't wish us to be parted, Violet."

She burst into a violent fit of crying and sobbing. She had been struggling bravely to repress this gathering emotion; but his direct reference to the very thought that was overshadowing her mind was too much for her. And along with this wild grief came as keen remorse, for was this the conduct required of an attendant upon an invalid?

"You must forgive me," she sobbed. "I don't know what it is: I have been very nervous of late—and—and—"

"There is nothing to cry about, Violet," said he, gently; "what is to be, is to be. You have not lost your old courage? Only let us be together while we can."

"Oh, my love, my love!" she suddenly cried, taking his hand in both of hers, and looking up to him with her piteous, tear-dimmed eyes, "we will always be together! What is it that you say? What is it that you mean? Not that you are going away without me? I have courage for any thing but that. It does not matter what comes, only that I must go with you—we two together!"

"Hush, hush, Violet!" said he, soothingly, for he saw that the girl was really beside herself with grief and apprehension. "Come, this is not like the brave Violet of old. I thought there was nothing in all the world you were afraid to face. Look up, now."

She released his hand, and a strange expression came over her face. That wild outburst had been an involuntary confession; now a great fear and shame filled her heart that she should have been betrayed into it, and in a despairing, pathetic fashion she tried to explain away her words.

"We shall be together, shall we not?" she said, with an affected cheerfulness, though she was still crying gently.

"It does not matter what part of the Highlands you go to—I will go with you. I must write and explain to Mrs. Dowse. It would be a pity that we should separate so soon, after that long time, would it not? And then the brisk air of the hills, and of the yachting, will be better for you than the hot summer here, won't it? And I am sure you will get very well there; that is just the place for you to get strong; and when the time for the shooting comes, we shall all go out, as we used to do, to see you missing every bird that gets up."

She tried to smile, but did not succeed very well.

"And really it does not matter to me so very much what part we go to, for, as you say, one ought to conquer these feelings; and if you prefer Castle Bandbox, I will go there, too—that is, I shall be very proud to go if I am not in the way. And you know I am the only one who can make cartridges for you."

"I don't think I shall trouble the cartridges very much," said he, glad to think she was becoming more cheerful.

"Indeed," she continued, "I don't know what would have become of your gun if I had not looked after it, for you only half cleaned it, and old Peter would not touch it, and the way the sea air rusted the barrels was quite remarkable. Will you have No. 3 or No. 4 shot this year for the sea-birds?"

"Well," he answered, gravely, "you see we shall have no yacht this year, and probably no chances of wild duck at all; and it would scarcely be worth while to make cartridges merely to fire away at these harmless and useless sea-pyots and things of that sort."

"Oh, but my papa could easily get us a yacht," she said, promptly; "he would be delighted—I know he would be delighted. And I have been told you can get a small yacht for about forty pounds a month, crew and everything included, and what is that? Indeed, I think it is quite necessary you should have a yacht."

"Forty pounds," said he; "I think we could manage that. But then we should deduct something from the wages of the crew on the strength of our taking our own cook with us. Do you remember that cook? She had a wonderful trick of making apricot-jam puddings: how the dickens she managed to get so much jam crammed in I never could make out. She was just about as good at that as at making cartridges. Did you ever hear of that cook?"

By this time they had walked gently back to the carriage, and now Mrs. Warrener and her daughter made their appearance. The elder woman noticed something strange about

Violet's expression, but she did not speak of it, for surely the girl was happy enough? She was, indeed, quite merry. She told Mrs. Warrener she was ready to go with them to the Highlands whenever they chose. She proposed that this time they should go up the Caledonian Canal, and go down by Loch Maree, and then go out and visit the western isles. She said the sooner they went, the better; they would get all the beautiful summer of the North; it was only the autumn tourists who complained of the rain of the Highlands.

"But we had little rain last autumn," said Mrs. Warrener.

"Oh, very little indeed," said Violet, quite brightly; "we had charming weather all through. I never enjoyed myself anywhere so much. I think the sooner your brother gets up to the Highlands, the better; it will do him a world of good."

CHAPTER XLVII.

DU SCHMERZENSREICHE!

So the long, silent, sunlit days passed, and it seemed to the three patient watchers that the object of their care was slowly recovering health and strength. But if they were all willing and eager to wait on him, it was Violet who was his constant companion and friend, his devoted attendant, his humble scholar. Sometimes when Mrs. Warrener's heart grew sore within her to think of the wrong that had been wrought in the past, the tender little woman tried to solace herself somewhat by regarding these two as they now sat together—he the whimsical, affectionate, playful, and kindly master, she the meek pupil and disciple, forgetting all the proud dignity of her maidenhood, her fire, and audacity, and independence, in the humility and self-surrender of her love. Surely, she thought, this time was making up for much of the past. And if all went well now, what had they to look forward to but a still closer companionship in which the proud and loyal and fearless girl would become the tender and obedient wife? There was no jealousy in the nature of this woman. She would have laughed with joy if she could have heard their marriage-bells.

And Violet, too, when the sun lay warm on the daisies and cowslips, when the sweet winds blew the scent of the lilacs about, and when her master and teacher grew strong enough to walk with her along the quiet woodland ways, how could she fail to pick up some measure of cheerfulness and hope? It almost seemed as if she had dropped into a new world; and it was a beautiful world, full of tenderness, and laughter, and sunshine. Henceforth there was to be no more George Miller to bother her; he had gone clean out of existence, as far as she was concerned; there was no more skirmishing with Lady North; even the poor Dowses, with their piteous loneliness and solemn house, were almost forgotten. Here was her whole world. And when she noticed the increasing distances that he walked, and the brighter look of his face, and the growing courage and carelessness of his habits, then, indeed, the world became a beautiful world to her, and she was almost inclined to fall in love with those whirling and gleaming southern seas.

It was in the black night-time, when all the household but herself were asleep, that she paid the penalty of these transient joys. Haunted by the one terrible fear, she could gain no rest; it was in vain that she tried to reason with herself; her imagination was like some hideous fiend continually whispering to her ear. Then she had no friend with whom to share these terrible doubts; she dared not mention them to any human soul. Why should she disturb the gentle confidence of his sister and her daughter? She could not make them miserable merely to lift from her own mind a portion of its anxiety. She could only lie awake, night after night, and rack her brain with a thousand gloomy forebodings. She recalled certain phrases he had used in moments of pathetic confidence. She recalled the quick look of pain with which he sometimes paused in the middle of his speech, the almost involuntary raising the hand to the region of the heart, the passing pallor of the face. Had they seen none of those things? Had they no wild, despairing thoughts about them? Was it possible they could go peacefully to sleep with this dread thing hanging over them, with a chance of awaking to a day of bitter anguish and wild, heart-broken farewell? This cruel anxiety, kept all to herself was killing the girl. She grew restless and feverish; sometimes she sat up half the night at the window listening to the moaning of the dark sea outside: she became languid during the day, pale, and *distraite.* But it was not to last long.

One evening these two were together in the small parlor, he lying down, she sitting near him with a book in her hand. The French windows were open; they could hear Mrs. Warrener and her daughter talking in the garden. And, strangely enough, the sick man's thoughts were once more turned to the far Highlands, and to their life among the hills, and the pleasant merry-making on board the *Sea-Pyot.*

"The air of this place does not agree with you at all, Violet," he was saying. "You are not looking nearly so well as you did when we came down. You are the only one who has not benefited by the change. Now that won't do; we can not have a succession of invalids—a Greek frieze of patients, all carrying phials of medicine. We must get off to the Highlands at once. What do you say—a fortnight hence?"

She knelt down beside him and took his hand, and said, in a low voice,

"Do not be angry with me—it is very unreasonable, I know—but I have a strange dread of the Highlands. I have dreamed so often lately of being up there—and of being swept away on a dark sea—in the middle of the night."

She shuddered. He put his hand gently on her head.

"There is no wonder you should dream of that," he said, with a smile. "That is only part of the story which you made us all believe. But we have got a brighter finish for it now. You have not been overwhelmed in that dark flood yet—"

He paused.

"Violet!—my love!" he suddenly cried.

He let go her hand, and made a wild grasp at his left breast; his face grew white with pain. What made her instinctively throw her arms round him, with terror in her eyes?

"Violet—what is this?—kiss me!"

It was but one second after that that a piercing shriek rang through the place. The girl had sprung up like a deer shot through the heart; her eyes dilated, her face wild and pale. Mrs. Warrener came running in; but paused, and almost retreated in fear from the awful spectacle before her; for the girl still held the dead man's hand, and she was laughing merrily. The dark sea that she had dreaded had overtaken her at last.

But one more scene—months afterward. It is the breakfast-room in Lady North's house in Euston Square, and Anatolia is sitting there alone. The door opens, and a tall young girl, dressed in a white morning costume, comes silently in: there is a strange and piteous look of trouble in her dark eyes. Anatolia goes over to her, and takes her hand very tenderly, and leads her to the easy-chair she had herself just quitted.

"There is not any letter yet?" she asks, having looked all round the table with a sad and wearied air.

"No, dear, not yet," says Anatolia, who, unlovely though she may be, has a sympathetic heart; and her lip trembles as she speaks. "You must be patient, Violet."

"It is another morning gone, and there is no letter, and I can not understand it," says the girl, apparently to herself; and then she begins to cry silently, while her half-sister goes to her, and puts her arm round her neck, and tries to soothe her.

Lady North comes into the room. Some changes have happened within these few months; it is "Mother" and "My child" now between the enemies of yore. And as she bids Violet good-morning, and gently kisses her, the girl renews her complaint.

"Mother, why do they keep back his letter? I know he must have written to me long ago; and I can not go to him until I get the letter! and he will wonder why I am not coming. Morning after morning I listen for the postman—I can hear him in the street—from house to house—and they all get their letters, but I don't get this one, that is worth all the world to me. And I never neglected any thing that he said—and I was always very obedient to him—and he will wonder now that I don't go to him, and perhaps he will think that I am among my other friends now, and have forgotten— No, he will not think that. I have not forgotten."

"My child, you must not vex yourself," says Lady North, with all the tenderness of which she is capable; and Anatolia is bitterly crying all the while. "It will be all right. And you must not look sad to-day; for you know Mrs. Warrener and your friend Amy are coming to see you."

She does not seem to pay much heed.

"Shall we go for the flowers to-day?" she asks, with her dark, wet eyes raised for the first time.

"My darling, this is not the day we go for the flowers; that is to-morrow."

"And what is the use of it?" she says, letting her head sink sadly again. "Every time I go over to Nunhead I listen—all by myself—and I know he is not there at all. The flowers look pretty, because his name is over them; but he is not there at all—he is far away—and he was to send me a message—and every day I wait for it—and they keep the letter back. Mother, are all my dresses ready?"

"Yes, Violet."

"You are quite sure?"

"They are all ready, Violet; don't trouble about that."

"It is the white satin one he will like the best; and he will be pleased that I am not in black, like the others. Mother, Mrs. Warrener and Amy surely can not mean to come to the wedding in black ? "

" Surely not, Violet ! But come, dear, to your breakfast."

She took her place quite calmly and humbly ; but her mind was still wandering towards that picture.

" I hope they will strew the church-yard with flowers as we pass through it—not for me, but for him, for he will be pleased with that ; and there is more than all that is in the Prayer-book that I will promise to be to him, when we two are kneeling together. You are quite sure, mother, that every thing is ready ? "

" Every thing, my darling."

" And you think the message from him will come soon now ? "

" I think it will come soon now, Violet," was the answer, given with trembling lips.

* * * * * * *

And now to you—you whose names are written in these blurred pages, some portion of whose lives I have tried to trace with a wandering and uncertain pen—I stretch out a hand of farewell. Yet not quite of farewell, perhaps ; for, amidst all the shapes and phantoms of this world of mystery, where the shadows we meet can tell us neither whence they came nor whither they go, surely you have for me a no less substantial existence that may have its chances in the time to come. To me you are more real than most I know what wonder, then if I were to meet you on the threshold of the great unknown you all shining with a new light on your face ? Trembling, I stretch out my hands to you, for your silence is awful, and there is sadness in your eyes ; but the day may come when you will speak, and I shall hear—and understand.

* * * * * * *

THE END.

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